

FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 51

INTO UNKNOWN LANDS

or The Secret of
the Enchanted Diamond



BY
CORNELIUS SHEA

Suddenly Royal stumbled and fell to the ground. Frank rushed a few yards further and then an agonized cry came to his ears. Turning, the boy beheld the horrible denizen of the underground forest slowly making off with the body of Royal Henderson, firmly grasped in one of its huge claws.

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INTO UNKNOWN LANDS;

OR,

The Secret of the Enchanted Diamond.

By CORNELIUS SHEA.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN GAUL'S SECRET.

In a cozy little room on the third floor of a building situated in Princeton, New Jersey, two young men were seated. Neither of them was over nineteen, but they were both large, well-formed, supple young fellows. A single glance at the walls of the room would satisfy the ordinary observer that its inmates were "college boys."

The only pictures to be seen were those representing rowing races, football games, boxing bouts, etc.

A pair of fencing foils hung upon a nail, and near them a pair of Indian clubs, tied together with a shoestring, were suspended from a picture hook.

A banjo stood in a corner, along with a rifle and a breech-loading shotgun, and on a stand in the opposite corner lay a book on the dead languages, an algebra, a set of boxing gloves, and a pack of cards. Of the four articles mentioned, I am sorry to say that the boxing gloves and the pack of cards looked as though they were put to use much oftener than the books.

The room belonged to Frank Mercer, who, if anything, was a trifle stouter than his visitor, Royal Henderson.

The two boys were chums at the college, and during

the evenings when they had nothing better to do, they spent their time in Frank's room.

The reason it was always Frank's room was because Royal was poor, and could not afford the luxuries that his chum could, who was the son of wealthy parents.

Royal was an orphan, and had always lived with an aunt until he came to college.

The old lady insisted on his being educated, stating that she had enough income to just bear his expenses, and that he might just as well get the benefit of what little she had then, as to wait until after her death.

And so Royal Henderson went to college, and though he studied his lessons well, he soon proved himself to be an athlete, and an adept at all college games.

On this particular evening that we find the chums in Frank Mercer's room, a shade of gloom is on the face of Royal.

His kind aunt had died a week before, and he had just returned to Princeton to finish the term, and then strike out for himself, whether he graduated or not.

"So your aunt didn't leave much property behind her, Royal?" said Frank.

"No. What she left would barely amount to two hundred dollars. The income she received expired when

she died. It was from some wealthy cousin, I believe, who took enough interest in the old lady to provide for her while she lived."

"She left no valuables, or papers, then?"

"Yes, she did; and that is why I am so downcast and gloomy. Frank, old fellow, you are the best friend I have in the world, now; and I am going to show what she left besides the little cash."

Royal tore the paper from a box, which Frank had looked at when his chum first came in, expecting that it contained fifty choice cigars.

There was nothing strange in this, since it was just about the size and shape of a cigar box.

But when the paper was removed, Frank Mercer gave a low whistle of surprise.

It was the most curious box he had ever seen, for it appeared to be made out of the horn or tusk of some monster animal.

It was engraved on all sides with peculiar, outlandish figures, and looked odd and mysterious in the extreme.

"That," said Royal, "my aunt gave me a short time before she died. She said that it might bring me good, but more possibly evil. She showed me the manner of opening the box, and bade me not to examine its contents until after her death."

"That's curious!" exclaimed Frank. "It seems that I am on the eve of some mystery."

"You are," returned his companion, quietly. "A wonderful mystery, I think."

He pressed on the side of the box, and the lid flew back, disclosing a small roll of parchment and a little leather tobacco pouch.

Unrolling the parchment, he handed it to his chum to read.

The words on it had evidently been written a century before, but the writing was plain and legible.

Frank read the following:

"READ THIS, YE WHO ARE IN SEARCH OF FAME AND FORTUNE:

"I, John Gaul, in my right mind, and of my own free will and accord, do claim and make known that there exists a place within this great and good earth, where wonders and marvels never cease. I have been there, and know whereof I speak.

"In this place, which is surely enchanted, men live who lived before the time of Noah, and who are yet young and in the prime of life. In this place are to be found beasts and birds such as mankind never dreamed of. In this place are untold riches. In this place lives the father of all magic and everything that is wonderful. I will say no more; but if ye would go to find whether I lie or not, take the course that I have laid out on the map below, and go to Russian America.

"When ye shall come to the end of the marked route, where the star is, you will surely find a thin piece of

crystal before you. Take the diamond, which is enchanted, from the tobacco pouch, where I have placed it, and draw it across the crystal. Then shall ye find the entrance to this most wonderful place!"

"January 10, 1795.

JOHN GAUL."

That was all there was of the writing, but directly beneath it was a rude map of Russian America, or Alaska, as it is now called.

A black-dotted line led to a point within fifty miles of the seacoast, and here a star was marked.

Frank Mercer read this peculiar document with distended eyes, and then mechanically picked the tobacco pouch from the box.

He opened it, and a diamond, whose luster was so great that it fairly dazzled his eyes, fell into his open palm.

It was nearly octagon in shape, and was about the size of a robin's egg.

"That is the enchanted diamond," said Royal. "What do you think of the whole thing, Frank?"

"What do I think of it? Why, in the first place, old fellow, that stone is worth a small fortune!"

"And in the second place?"

"Well, in the second place, if what John Gaul has written there is true, you are the luckiest fellow in the world to-day!"

"John Gaul was my great-grandfather, and that writing is surely his. It is either the truth, or else he was crazy when he wrote it."

"How is it that no one has attempted the journey long before this?" asked Frank, with a puzzled air.

"Because," returned Frank, "my aunt informed me that she was cautioned, and her mother before her, that no one save a male descendant of the old man was to make the attempt. John Gaul never had a son, nor a grandson, but I am his great-grandson, and the only one, at that."

"Ah! I see. Well, this is a mystery! Royal, I wouldn't sell that diamond if I were you; though I know it is worth lots of money."

"What would you do with it?"

"I would keep it, and go and look for this wonderful place."

"I mean to as soon as I can get to work, and save up the necessary funds to pay my expenses."

"You needn't let the expenses of the trip bother you," exclaimed Frank.

"Why not?"

"Because, if you will let me go with you, I'll pay all the expenses."

"Do you mean it?" asked Royal, with tears in his eyes.

"I do, old fellow! Why! this is the chance of a lifetime. If the thing is a fake, after we get out to Alaska, you can easily sell the enchanted diamond, and get enough out of it to set you up in business."

"That's so," mused Royal. "Well, I should be glad to have you accompany me on this wonderful mission, above any one else in the world, only I don't like to be dependent on you for my expenses."

"Don't let that worry you. Things are already fixed for this journey. My father has promised me a thousand dollars to defray my expenses in a trip to California and Mexico, the first of July, and instead of going there we will go to Alaska. The first of July is only three weeks off, too. So we will begin to make preparations at once."

Royal seized his chum by the hand, and gave it a hearty shake.

"I really believe there is something in it," said he. "My great-grandfather is said to have had a shade of mystery connected with his life. He was also thought to be dead, but after an absence of twenty years he turned up alive, and very rich. You may depend upon it that some such place as he describes really existed at that time, though I hardly believe that the diamond is enchanted."

"We will find out all about it, old fellow," said Frank, whose adventurous spirit was raised to the top notch.

CHAPTER II.

THE DIAMOND IS PUT TO THE TEST.

Royal Henderson and Frank Mercer arrived at Port Townsend, Washington, without any particular adventure.

Frank was well supplied with funds, so they were finely equipped for their undertaking.

Almost the first thing they did on reaching Port Townsend was to look about for a vessel that was bound to some port in Alaska.

They were lucky enough to find a whaling schooner that had touched at that port for supplies, and was bound for the Behring Sea.

For a reasonable sum the captain agreed to land Royal and Frank at Kingogun, a small town on the extreme western point of the Cape Prince of Wales.

The schooner was to sail on Saturday, and as it was Thursday when the two chums arrived at Port Townsend, they did not have a great while to wait.

After securing passage, the boys returned to the hotel they had concluded to stop at during their stay in the place, and did not go out again till the next day.

The weather was balmy and pleasant, and after breakfasting they took a stroll about the town to see what it looked like.

But they soon found there was not much to see, and after a couple of hours started back for the hotel.

A knock came at the door of their room, and a thin, wiry lad of about seventeen appeared. He had been a bell boy in the hotel, and had attracted both the boys' at-

tention by his pleasant, willing manners. He now had a tale of woe. He had been discharged.

"So you are out of a job, eh?" said Frank.

"Yes, sorr, I am."

"How would you like to go with us to Alaska?"

"Bedad! I would like ter go any place with two sich fine young gentlemen as yourselves."

"Stop your blarney, now. What is your name?"

"Danny Butler, sorr."

"You would be just the fellow to go with us, providing you would be willing to work for your board and clothes, and risk your life in a strange country."

"I am willing, sorr."

"We leave to-morrow morning at eight o'clock. Can you get ready in that time?" asked Royal, who was heartily glad that Frank had asked the Irish lad to go with them.

"I am ready now, sorr. All that I have in the world is tied up in my pocket handkerchief."

"Well," said Frank, after a moment of thought, "if you want to go with us you must take a note down to the captain of the whaling schooner *St. Nicholas*, which lies at the wharf."

"Are we to go on a ship, sorr?" asked Danny Butler.

"We are. You must take a note to the captain, which I will write, telling him that there will be three of us to go instead of two."

"Wrote it, sorr, an' I'll go roight away, bedad!"

Frank hastily penned the necessary note, and Danny took it, and thrust it carefully in his pocket.

Royal and Frank boarded the schooner a few minutes before the time she was to sail.

Danny came out of the cabin as the boys walked aft. He had been sent down early in the morning with the luggage that Royal and Frank could not very well carry.

"We have another passenger, bedad!" said the Irish lad, as he led the way to a stateroom containing four berths.

"Another passenger!" echoed our friends. "Who is it, Danny?"

"A foine old gentleman by ther name of Profissor Juggles. He is bound for ther same port as we are. He is to meet a number of friends there, so he says."

At this moment a lanky, good-natured looking man of probably sixty years of age, entered the cabin.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said he. "As we are to be fellow-passengers, we might as well get acquainted at once. I am Prof. Juggles. I am going to Alaska strictly in the interest of science. I expect to meet a party of friends at Kingogun, who will accompany me on an expedition through the wildest part of the territory."

The chums replied by giving their names, and stating that their destination in Alaska was but a short distance from Kingogun.

BRAVE AND BOLD.

"I hope you will make up your minds to join my party, and go farther," said the professor.

"That all depends upon the result of our trip to the place we are bound for," returned Royal.

"Well," observed Frank Mercer, after a pause, "there are four of us to occupy four berths in this little stateroom, so suppose we settle where each one is to sleep."

"A good idea," nodded Prof. Juggles. "If you have no objections, I will take one of the lower berths, as I am not much used to climbing."

"Certainly," replied the chums.

Five minutes later everything was settled to the satisfaction of all hands. Royal and Frank took possession of the two berths on the right, and the professor and Danny Butler took the other two, the Irishman being assigned the upper one.

The four now made their way on deck, and were just in time to see the schooner push off from the dock.

When she had cleared, the few vessels that were lying at anchor, her sails were hoisted, and the voyage to Alaska was begun.

Our friends found the professor to be a fine old gentleman, and they grew to like him better every day.

Passengers on a whaling schooner do not have a very enjoyable time of it, neither are their accommodations and fare much of a luxury, and skipping over the details of the voyage, we will say that our friends were heartily glad when the schooner arrived at the little town of Kingogun one day, just as the shades of night were beginning to gather.

The captain concluded to anchor there till the next morning, and kindly offered his passengers the accommodations of his vessel until then.

But they, one and all, refused his offer, saying they were anxious to get upon land as soon as possible.

It was just about dark when they clambered over the schooner's side into a boat that was waiting to take them ashore, and with a hearty farewell to the captain and his crew, they were rowed ashore.

The four who had bidden farewell to the schooner walked along for about ten minutes, and then came to a halt in front of a low, one-storied building, which was covered by a thatched roof.

It was a public place kept by a half-breed Indian.

After scrutinizing the place for a while, Prof. Juggles exclaimed:

"This is the place where I was to meet my companions. Let us go in, and see if they are here."

Pushing open the door, the four entered.

A greasy-looking, dark-skinned man arose and politely asked them, in fair English, how he could serve them.

The professor promptly asked for his friends.

"They are dead!" was the blunt reply.

"What!" gasped the astonished professor.

"The white men you ask for are dead," went on the half-breed. "The bad Indians killed them up in the mountains three months ago."

"Then my mission here amounts to nothing," groaned the professor, his face pale as a sheet.

The chums felt sorry for the man.

His actions showed that the sad news of the death of his friends was a heavy blow to him.

"I'll tell you what you can do, professor," said Royal, after a moment's thought. "You can go with us on one of the strangest missions man ever set out upon."

In spite of his grief, the old man became interested.

"I'll tell you all about it," went on Royal, "as soon as we engage a night's lodging and get some supper."

The half-breed said he could accommodate them, and promptly had supper prepared.

The meal was not of the best, but there was plenty of fresh reindeer meat, and as they had eaten nothing but salt meats for some time, it was quite a luxury.

After supper they were ushered into a small apartment, which had half a dozen bunks in it, after the fashion of what they had been used to on shipboard.

The host said they might have the room all to themselves, as there were on other guests at his hotel.

As soon as the four were left to themselves, Royal explained the reason of Frank and himself coming to Alaska.

When the professor had seen the diamond, and thoroughly examined the document and map, he could scarcely contain himself.

"The most wonderful thing I ever heard of," said he. "You boys must put a good deal of faith in the truthfulness of this, or you would never have come so far."

Royal kept nothing from him, but related every circumstance connected with the affair.

When the professor was asked a second time to go with them, he arose to his feet, and quickly exclaimed:

"Go? Why, certainly, I'll go."

That settled it.

The next morning our friends were up before daylight.

After breakfast the half-breed was kind enough to take them to a dealer in horses, and they were not long in purchasing four stout, sure-footed ponies.

Then each, being well armed and equipped, set out over the moss-covered waste of land in the direction of the star old John Gaul had marked in his chart.

The animals they rode were much better than they expected to obtain, and they covered the ground at a good gait.

They kept on until about the middle of the afternoon without meeting an adventure.

Then, according to the compass, which told the direction they had been traveling, Royal estimated that they must be somewhere in the neighborhood of where they wanted to go.

A huge mound of rocks was supposed to be at the point where the star was marked on the chart.

Suddenly, as they rounded a bend, they came in sight of a mound that about answered the description.

Royal began to grow excited.

Two minutes later they came to a halt.

The chums sprang from the backs of their horses.

In the side of the huge mound was a wide-mouthed cave.

Naturally the boys peered into this.

Almost the first thing they saw was a glittering patch of crystal upon the rear wall of the cave!

Royal pointed to the crystal, which lay tight against the wall of rock behind it, and with a voice that trembled slightly, exclaimed:

"What my great-grandfather wrote on the parchment has proved true, thus far! Now for the test!"

He took the diamond from his pocket, and after hesitating a moment, drew it quickly across the surface of the crystal.

The moment he did so there was a loud report, followed by a violent crash, and the back of the cave fell out before their very eyes!

CHAPTER III.

JOHN GAUL'S KNIFE.

Though it was true that Royal Henderson expected some remarkable thing to occur when he drew the diamond across the crystal, he was not prepared for what followed.

A cry of mingled fear and surprise left his lips, and he staggered back against his chum, Frank Mercer, who was also badly frightened.

"My God!" cried Prof. Juggles, from the mouth of the cave. "What terrible thing has happened?"

"Murther!" yelled the Irish lad; "ther avil one is afther bein' in there. Let's git back to ther ship roight away!"

As these remarks came to their ears Royal and Frank recovered themselves.

"There is no cause for alarm," spoke up the former. "We have discovered the entrance that will lead us to the place where wonders and marvels never cease! Professor, do not be surprised at anything; and Danny, you brace up, and stop acting as though you had seen a ghost. Just stick to us, and you will be all right."

"That's it," exclaimed Frank. "Royal acted according to the directions written by his great-grandfather, and thus far the truth of the document has been proven. I

move that we proceed into the passage that has opened for us without further delay!"

"I second the motion," cried his chum.

"I am heartily in favor of it," the professor hastened to say. "I have cast my lot with you two young men, and it will not be my fault if I do not stick by you through thick and thin."

Danny had nothing to say on the subject, but when the two boys mounted their horses and rode them into the cave he was as quick as the professor to follow them.

The passageway our hero had opened, by drawing the diamond across the crystal, was wide enough to admit two horsemen, side by side, and was about fifteen feet from ground to roof.

Consequently there was no need of their pursuing their way on foot.

"Stop just a moment!" exclaimed the professor, as they passed from the cave into the passage that led from the rear of it; "there is one thing that I would like to know before we proceed farther."

"What is that?" asked Frank.

"I want to know what caused this place to open when you cut the glass, or crystal, with the diamond."

"That is so," said Frank. "We might as well look into that a bit."

Dismounting, they began to carefully examine the place, and soon discovered that two gigantic bowlders had fallen back on either side, thus causing the opening.

At their feet lay the fragments of the patch of crystal, which was no thicker than an ordinary pane of glass, and a few flecks of brownish dust that smelled like sulphur.

That was all there was to explain the mystery!

"My theory is," said the professor, "that the bowlders were fastened together by means of the piece of crystal and some powerful cement that was lasting. When the diamond cut the crystal the weight of the bowlders caused them to fall aside."

"Yes," returned Frank; "but what caused the explosion?"

"That I cannot conjecture."

"There is no use in worrying ourselves over the matter," spoke up Royal. "The enchanted diamond has accomplished just what my ancestor wrote it would do. Thus far his statement is true, and if the rest proves to be so, we will have so many strange mysteries to solve, that if we attempt to unravel them, it will take us the best part of a hundred years to finish our journey."

"I hardly agree with you," replied Frank, with a shake of his head. "I think we ought to find out what we can as we go along."

"Yes, if we can possibly do so," added the professor.

"I think we had better be afther lavin' ther place entirely," spoke up the Irish lad. "There mus' certainly

be witches somewhere about; an' where they be no man should go."

This sally caused a laugh from Danny's companions, so he said no more.

"My idea," said Royal, "is that we follow this passage until we reach the wonderful place we are in search of, or else find that we can go no farther for some good reason, and marvel at nothing that we have to contend with. If this place is full of mysteries, there must certainly be a reason for them all, and when he have once found that reason, they will be explained to us without a doubt."

The remarks of our hero suited Frank and the professor, and with one accord they expressed their desire that he should be the leader, and they his followers.

This being settled, the four adventurers mounted their horses again.

Then it occurred to them that they must have a light if they wished to proceed farther.

They each had a strong lantern, and, lighting one of them, they set out through the underground passage that, according to the statement of the departed John Gaul, led to the most wonderful place man ever dreamed of.

Not knowing exactly what they might have to encounter, our friends kept their weapons ready for instant use.

When they had proceeded a couple of hundred yards, they found they were going down a gradual descent.

"Is it possible that we are going to find people living underground?" observed Prof. Juggles.

"It surely is possible, professor; but whether it is the fact or not we will find out in due time," returned Frank.

Royal did not venture a remark on the subject.

He was busy with his own thoughts, wondering if they were really going to find the wonderful place his great-grandfather wrote about.

For the next half hour they rode along in silence, and then Danny remarked it was pretty near supper time.

This was a reminder to all hands that their stomachs were about empty; so, a few minutes later, when they reached a part of the passage where it widened considerably, they came to a halt and dismounted.

Frank quickly discovered a stream of clear water trickling down the left side of the passage, and, as soon as all had refreshed themselves with a drink, a two-pound tin of canned beef was opened.

They had bought half a dozen cans before leaving Port Townsend, and this was the first they had opened.

This, and a small bag of sea biscuit, was all they had with them in the line of eatables; but, as they were hungry, the food tasted very good.

For their horses they had nothing but a small bale of some sort of dried moss, which they had purchased with the animals.

This queer fodder seemed to be very nutritious, a few handfuls to each horse being enough to satisfy him.

About twenty minutes after eating they again mounted, and started on their way—down, as it appeared, toward the center of the earth.

Royal had made up his mind to proceed as far as their limited supply of food would allow them to go in case they failed to come across anything that was good to eat.

They kept on for three hours.

Prof. Juggles estimated that they must be at least half a mile below the surface of the ground now, and yet there seemed to be a plentiful supply of pure air.

"We will keep on till midnight, and then halt for a few hours' rest," said our hero.

As the minutes flitted by all hands began to grow weary. They were not used to being in the saddle, else they would not have minded it so much.

A few minutes before the hour of midnight, Royal, who was in advance with the lantern, suddenly brought his horse to a stop.

Much surprised at his action, his companions followed his example.

Before a question could be put to him, he pointed ahead of him, and exclaimed:

"Look!"

He directed the rays of the lantern on an object that was lying on the ground.

It was a human skeleton, well preserved and whitened by time!

Danny Butler nearly had a fit at sight of the grawsome object, but instead of being frightened, his companions became serious. So much so, in fact, that they dismounted to get a closer view of the ghastly relic of humanity.

As they bent over it, with the light of the lantern shining full upon it, a simultaneous cry of surprise came from their lips.

And no wonder! Between the fleshless ribs a knife was sticking!

The handle was made of horn, and as Royal and his companions inspected it with distended eyes, they became aware of the fact that it had two letters carved on the handle.

They were "J. G."

"My great-grandfather's knife!" exclaimed Royal, in a solemn tone; and then, with the utmost coolness, he seized the weapon, and drew it from the ribs of the skeleton, where, in all probability, it had rested for a century.

Then the rays of the lantern happened to strike upon the wall of the passage near the skeleton.

It was a sort of soft sandstone, and upon it a number of letters were carved.

Time had done nothing to deface them, and it took our friends but a short time to make out the following words:

"Here is the spot where I was compelled to kill a man to keep the enchanted diamond in my possession.

"Ye who would seek what I now leave,
Go on ten miles—my story believe.

"JOHN GAUL."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the professor. "Let us go on by all means."

With one accord they mounted their horses, Royal keeping the knife he had plucked from the ribs of the skeleton.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE LAND OF WONDER.

Royal and his companions left the skeleton and the inscription on the wall behind them, and started down the passage.

"We may as well go ten miles farther before we take a rest," said he.

"When we travel that far we will be somewhere in the neighborhood of Kingogun, only nearly a mile under it," observed the professor. "According to my compass, we have been traveling due west ever since we entered the passage."

"Then the chances are that our journey is nearly ended, for if we keep on going we will fetch up in the waters of Behring Straits," returned Frank.

"Not necessarily. Suppose the passage proceeds under it?" said Royal. "You must remember that we are far below the surface of the earth, Frank."

"I think we had better be afther turnin' back; but as I have no say in ther matter, I will not speake me moind," exclaimed Danny Butler.

This remark caused a laugh, and then, for the next fifteen minutes, nothing but the clatter of horses' hoofs broke the somber stillness.

The passage continued on in an unbroken, gradual descent, and the tired horses kept covering the ground at a sharp trot.

When an hour had passed since their leaving the skeleton, it struck all hands they had about made the ten miles, and they prepared themselves for some sort of a surprise.

Suddenly, without the least warning, a brilliant light flashed in their faces, and they saw that they had entered a cavern, which was so vast in extent they could not conjecture as to how large it really was.

The extraordinary light caused the horses to prance about, and utter loud snorts of terror.

Before our friends could recover from their astonishment, there came a deafening crash, and then all was shrouded in darkness, even the lantern in Royal's hand going out.

An interval of ten seconds elapsed, and then the light flashed up again.

The four adventurers rubbed their eyes, and gave a gasp.

Within a dozen feet of them stood a score of men.

Each one wore a beard which touched the ground, and all were scantily attired in a garb manufactured from the skins of animals.

The complexion of the strange people was a sickly yellow—like that of a person suffering with a severe attack of jaundice—and their features showed they belonged to the intelligent order of human beings.

The horses ridden by our friends stood stock-still in their tracks, and trembled violently.

Presently one of the strange race of people advanced toward them, speaking in a loud and distinct voice in some language unknown to them.

Resolving to make the best of the peculiar, not to say startling, situation, Royal bowed politely, and exclaimed:

"We are friends!"

These words seemed to have a startling effect upon the strange men; they began conversing among themselves in a hurried manner.

After a period of perhaps a minute, he who had advanced toward them spoke again.

In good English he said:

"You speak the language taught us by one who left here many years ago. Who are you? Are you anything to him?"

With great presence of mind, Royal drew the enchanted diamond from his pocket, and held it out; and as the light struck it the jewel glittered like a star in the blue canopy of the heavens.

"By this we ask permission!" were the words that came from our hero's lips in a clear, ringing tone that echoed through the cavern.

"Then you must be of him who went away a century ago, strangers; you yet have the power to turn back whence you came."

"We do not care to go back," retorted Royal; "we seek to visit the land of your people, and learn its mysteries."

"Then go back you never will!"

As these words rung out our four friends were whisked from the backs of their horses as if by invisible hands, and then their senses left them.

The best part of an hour must have passed before they

returned to consciousness, and when they did so they found themselves reclining on soft couches in a spacious, well-lighted apartment.

That they had been drugged in some mysterious manner was evident, as they all awoke together at the sharp tinkle of a bell.

Much dazed and befuddled, the four adventurers raised themselves to a sitting posture, and gazed about them.

The Irish lad was the first to find the use of his tongue.

"Bedad!" said he, "I believe we are afther bein' in a palace!"

"It is rather strange how we got here," observed the professor, as he rubbed his eyes in a sleepy manner. "I remember being jerked from the back of my horse, and after that I knew nothing till a moment ago."

"I guess we were all treated that way," replied Royal. "Anyhow, I know I was."

"So was I," chimed in Frank.

"Me, too, bedad!" exclaimed Danny. "I wonder where our poor bastes are afther bein'?"

"If they are taken care of as good as we have been they ought to be perfectly satisfied," said the professor.

Their conversation was cut short at this moment by the sound of approaching footsteps.

The next moment a curtain of skins was thrown aside, and four maidens entered, bearing trays filled with eatables.

The girls were fairly good-looking, and were all attired in fawn-colored skirts and bodices.

They wore sandals instead of shoes, and their heads were simply covered with heavy braids of their own hair.

Without a word they deposited the trays on the ground in front of each of the four, and then took their departure.

"I didn't know I was hungry until I saw that load of food come in," observed Frank. "I feel now as though I hadn't eaten anything in a week."

"We will see what it is like, anyhow," ventured Royal. "It is meant for us, I suppose."

"Fresh meat!" exclaimed the professor; "and very good at that. And, by Jove! wine, too!"

"An' perenties!" added Danny. "Bedad! I knew we were in a palace!"

Though they did not know to a certainty what they were eating, our friends proceeded to devour the contents of the trays with a relish.

The professor went so far as to drink all his wine, and then throw out a hint for Royal and Frank to pass over what they did not want.

They did this, and when he had finished it the professor, becoming a trifle mellow, arose to his feet, and be-

gan to make a speech on the beauties and glories of the mysterious land they were visiting.

We say began to make a speech, for before he had uttered twenty words he was interrupted by the arrival of half a dozen men, who promptly motioned our friends to follow them.

What they had already passed through was enough to make them show an obedient disposition, and out they went through the curtained entrance of the apartment, behind the strange inhabitants of the underground place.

When they got outside, they found that they had been in a building of stone, and also that there were several more of the same sort within the limits of their vision.

Though it was certainly a vast cavern that they were in, they could neither see top nor sides, although it was lighted with a glare that was almost as bright as the noonday sun.

While Royal and his companions gazed about them in mute surprise, their horses were brought to them, and they were ordered to mount by the man who had first spoken to them on their arrival.

They were not long in getting into the saddle, and then the rumbling of wheels was heard.

The next minute a strange-looking animal, which looked to be half elephant, half rhinoceros, appeared before them, hitched to a long vehicle resembling a flat car.

A dozen men sprang upon this, and one of them seized the reins attached to a bit in the queer-looking animal's mouth.

"Follow where we lead!" exclaimed the man who appeared to be in charge. "You will now be taken before the ruler of all that is great and wonderful!"

"All right," replied Royal; "we are ready!"

Then the huge vehicle started, and our friends followed.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE THE KING.

How long it was our friends did not know, but it seemed that for several hours they traversed over the level floor of the vast cavern, and at length came to a halt in front of a strange but beautiful scene.

On a slight eminence of ground stood a building modeled after the style of some ancient temple of Biblical times.

Around this in a perfect circle was a chasm, containing a mass of living fire that flowed like a stream of water about twenty feet from the edges.

During the journey the visitors to the strange place had learned that the man who had been the only one to address them in their own language, was named Sandis.

He now told them that the temple was the home of the king of the Rabanos country, which the underground

place was called, and that he was also the father of all magic and everything that was wonderful.

"The king will show you some of his mystic power before you have been long in his presence," went on Sandis. "He speaks your language as well as I do. He learned it from him of whom you claim to be relatives, many years ago."

"Why, how old is the king?" asked Frank.

"Old? He is not old at all, neither is he young. He has lived since the formation of this place, and will continue to live to the end of time."

"That is pretty good," thought Frank. "I can take in some of the things I have been told, but that is a little too much. There is a big fraud connected with this peculiar country, and if I am permitted to stay here long enough, I'll ferret it out."

Danny Butler was the most affected by the remarkable assertion of Sandis, and he became so badly frightened that he had to gasp for breath.

"Think of it!" he exclaimed, with chattering teeth; "a man that has niver doied aven once in his whole loife. Bedad! it's crazy I'll be afther bein' if I iver heard ther loikes before!"

"What I say is the truth," repeated Sandis, noticing that his remarks did not appear to affect the other three to any great degree. "You will be forced to believe it later on."

"We have not said we doubted it," returned Royal, coolly. "Lead on! we would like to see the king."

"That is it," and Sandis smiled with an air of satisfaction. "I am glad that you believe me."

Then he drew a small ball from a pocket in his skin garment, and cast it into the flowing fire in the circular chasm.

The instant it touched the seething flames the ball exploded with a thunderous report.

The echoes had scarcely died out when a bridge shot across the chasm, causing a low murmur of surprise to come from the lips of the four adventurers, in spite of themselves.

Even Frank Mercer, who was the least affected of the four, felt a cold shiver run down his spinal column. The whole thing was so weird and mysterious that he became more uneasy at that moment than at any time since he had entered the underground passage.

The bridge appeared to be a very strong affair, and the material of which it was constructed glistened like a sheen of silver in the supernatural light that illumined the place.

It had scarcely settled in its place when Sandis gave the command to proceed, and then the queer draught animal pulled the vehicle over, followed by the four on horseback.

The moment they were over the bridge, a large door

in the temple-like structure opened, and a gorgeously attired man, apparently aged about thirty, stepped out to meet the party.

The natives made a profound bow, and, following their example, our friends bent their heads to their horses' necks.

Then followed a rather lengthy conversation between Sandis and the gorgeously attired man, which wound up by his being introduced to the strangers as king of the Rabanos country.

Frank, being rather blunt in his way, offered his hand to his majesty.

This seemed to please him rather than otherwise, for he grasped it in a manner that was cordial.

The other three followed the example set by their companion, and then the king, in good English, demanded to know which of the strangers was of kin to him who had visited and lived in the land of the Rabanos a century before.

"I am the party you ask for," spoke up Royal, in a tone of respect.

"That being so, you must have something with you to prove the truthfulness of your assertion."

"I have in my possession a precious stone that my great-grandfather, John Gaul, brought from this country, and willed to his first male descendant. I being the first, it came into my possession, together with a document relating to this country, and a chart giving a description how to reach it," said Royal.

"'Tis well. It is the enchanted diamond that you have. Produce it."

As Royal put his hand in the pocket where he had placed the precious stone, after showing it to the men they had first met, a look of blank amazement came into his face.

It was gone!

"What is the matter, Royal?" asked Frank.

"The diamond is not in my possession," was the reply. "It must be. I saw you put it in your pocket just before we were rendered unconscious."

"But it is not there now. I have lost it."

With a pale face our hero looked at the king, and said:

"Your majesty, I have lost the diamond!"

"What!" and the king's brow grew as black as a thundercloud. "Dare you trifle with one who has lived since the beginning of time, and who is the father of all magic? Produce the enchanted stone at once!"

In vain did Royal search his pockets. The diamond was gone, that was certain.

"I cannot produce it unless I can go back to the spot where your people first met us, and find it."

"I have been trifled with, and you four fools from the earth's surface shall die for it!"

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As the king spoke these words, he struck the staff he carried upon the ground.

A loud gong sounded, and then the four were enveloped in a cloud of smoke.

When this had cleared away the king had vanished, but a hideous-looking monster stood in his place.

It was fully as large as a bull, and had a horn projecting from its snout, with a point that was as sharp as a needle.

With distended jaws this underground monster rushed upon them.

Neither Royal nor Frank were made of the sort of stuff to allow themselves to be slain without a struggle.

Simultaneously they raised their rifles, and taking aim at the horrible creature's eyes, pulled the triggers.

The reports of their weapons blended into one, and the hideous underground denizen rolled over upon the ground in the agonies of death.

"Hurrah!" yelled Danny Butler. "We are——"

He did not finish what he was going to say, for at that instant a crowd of the natives, with Sandis at their head, surrounded Royal and his friends.

"Kill them on the spot!" cried Sandis. "They have slain our great and good king!"

"Hold!" exclaimed the rich, musical voice of a female. "They have not slain the king! It is the evil spirit of the Rabanos country lies before you in the agonies of death! All hail to the strangers!"

As our four adventurous friends caught sight of the speaker, they could scarcely believe their senses.

A girl, the perfect figure of grace and beauty, attired in a flowing gown of crimson, stood before them.

In her right hand she grasped a flaming sword, with which she held the natives at bay.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHILD OF SUNLIGHT..

"Stand back! stand back, even the great king of the Rabanos country! I am Media, the child of sunlight, and though my powers are limited, I will exercise them to their greatest extent!"

Thus spoke the beauteous female who so suddenly appeared upon the scene as Royal Henderson and his companions were about to be attacked by Sandis and the natives at his back.

The flaming sword the girl waved above her head burned with a strange, unnatural glow, and as our friends gazed at it they could not imagine what caused the metal blade to burn.

Sandis and his men cowered at the appearance of the girl. One by one they fell back, and came to a halt at a respectable distance.

"Follow me, friends from a strange country!" exclaimed she who called herself Media, the child of sunlight; "I will conduct you to the inside of the Temple of Mystery, as the building before us is called. Once within its walls you are forever safe. Come!"

The four did not hesitate about accepting the invitation. They were quite satisfied to leave the spot where the monster they had slain still lay, and also to get beyond the reach of Sandis and his men.

What had become of the king they knew not, and they marveled greatly at his disappearance as they rode behind the girl to the massive doorway of the temple.

A summons from Media brought two servants upon the scene, and at a command from her lips they promptly took the horses of our friends in charge, and led them to the rear of the imposing structure.

"Come on, and have no fear!" exclaimed the girl, in her rich, musical voice.

And then she conducted them into a broad hallway, and thence into a magnificently furnished apartment, which reminded our friends of the stories they had read of the East in ancient times.

With a wave of her hand, Media bade them be seated, and then, in some mysterious manner, caused the flames that still came from her sword to become extinguished.

There was not a chair in the room, but here and there upon the richly carpeted floor were cushions, gorgeous in color and inviting in appearance.

Not knowing what else to do under the circumstances, Frank Mercer sat down on one of these.

When they saw that this was what was required of them, his companions immediately followed his example.

A moment later the girl produced a curious-looking instrument from a curtained corner, and took a seat before them.

It was a stringed musical instrument, greatly resembling a harp, only much smaller, and after striking a few chords Media began singing a plaintive melody in such an entrancing voice that the four adventurers sat as though they had become rooted to the spot, and listened in rapt amazement.

While that song lasted it seemed to them that they were in a fairy dreamland, and it was at least a minute after the last note had died out before they recovered themselves and realized where they were.

Then Media laid the instrument down, and drawing her cushioned seat nearer to them, said:

"Strangers, will you kindly tell me who you are, and what brought you to this underground country?"

"Certainly!" replied Royal; and then he proceeded to relate the whole circumstance, from beginning to end.

The beautiful girl listened with marked attention until he was through, and seemed to be very much interested.

"I will now tell you something about myself," said she, "for I suppose you wonder who and what I am. As you have already heard me say, I am Media, the child of sunlight. Unlike you, I came to this underground country against my will."

"You are not a native of the Rabanos country, then?" observed Royal, in surprise.

"No, I am not. I belong to the land of sunlight, like yourselves; only not in the same latitude, I guess. I have lived in this place for nearly two years—against my will, I might add. My country is a long journey from here; but, thank God! the sun shines upon it, which it cannot do here. I am a perfect type of my people, so you will see that they are not like the natives here."

"Your people must be very beautiful," ventured Royal.

"They are. That is why they are bothered once every five years by the inhabitants of this strange country. To explain what I mean, I will state that every time the five years have elapsed, the king of the Rabanos country, with an army of men, pays a visit to the land of my birth, for the express purpose of selecting a wife."

"He chooses a young and beautiful girl, and then comes back here with his army, bringing her with him. My people do not object to this treatment, as they are not only a peaceful set, but are really under the government of the man who has lived since the commencement of time, and who is the father of all that is magical and wonderful.

"I was the last one chosen to be the bride of the king, but the marriage ceremony cannot take place until I am eighteen years of age, which will not be for three months. Then she who is now his wife will mysteriously disappear, and I will be forced to take her place.

"I can have anything I may demand save my liberty, until after I have become the wife of the king, and then my power is done. Thus you will see how I saved you from the king's wrath. From now until the day of my marriage you will be safe from all harm, as long as I say you shall be. After that, unless you manage to regain possession of the enchanted diamond, your lives will not be worth the snuff of a candle."

"Look here!" exclaimed Royal, suddenly, "you don't intend to marry the king, do you?"

"What else can I do?" asked the girl, in surprise.

"Why, leave this place, and go back to your own people," replied the boy.

"And be seized again, and have half my people slain on my account? No, that would not pay."

"See here, Media," said Royal, "you are beautiful and intelligent, and speak our language. But you know very little of the ways of the great world we live in. If you will place yourself under our care and protection, we will take you back to your native place, and see that the king

does not harm you. If there are half as many men in your country as there are here, I am sure we can fix it so that we could get the best of them, and keep them away from your country forever."

"You talk not wisely, but too well, I fear," was the retort. "Anyhow, I have made up by mind this very minute that I will not marry the king, and will place myself under your protection, for you seem to be of an all-powerful nation."

"That settles it!" exclaimed Royal. "Have faith in us, Media, and we will get you out of this mess of trouble you are in. If—"

Royal was interrupted by a loud report from outside, and springing to her feet, Media cried:

"The bridge! I will go and see who comes."

Bidding our friends remain where they were until she returned, the fair young creature glided from the room.

She had not gone two minutes when she came in as noiselessly as she had left.

Between the forefinger and thumb of her right hand she held something that shone almost with the glare of a live coal.

It was the enchanted diamond!

"Take it!" she exclaimed, handing it to our hero. "With this ever in your possession you may be able to get me safely to my own people. That diamond shall be my guiding star, and you, its owner, my guardian!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE HISTORY OF THE DIAMOND.

"The enchanted diamond!" gasped Royal. "How did you get possession of it?"

In as few words as possible, Media explained how she had snatched the precious stone from a man as he was about to hand it to the king.

"You have done well, Media!" exclaimed Royal. "And now let us talk about getting you away from here to your own land. You said a short time ago, that as I had regained possession of the enchanted diamond, it could be done. Now tell us what we will have to contend with while we are getting out of the wonderful underground country?"

"The king is all-powerful in the mystic art, and strange, unearthly things, and perils of all sorts, are bound to confront a person who does other than the king desires. Much of the king's mystic power I know, but the most puzzling and magical things that he does I do not understand. But no matter what happens, with the mystic diamond in your possession you can defy the king and all that is in his land."

"This whole business seems like some sort of a fairy story," said Frank Mercer. "I shall not be surprised if

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I wake up in Princeton presently, and find that I have been dreaming."

"The most difficult thing in getting away from the temple will be in crossing the chasm of fire," went on Media. "The bridge is an invention of the king, and he alone knows how to work it."

"How is it that you speak our language so fluently?" asked our hero, changing the subject.

"I was taught to speak it here in the temple. The language was first introduced by your great-grandfather, a long time ago. A great many of the underground people speak it, and the king always addresses me in your tongue."

"Would you mind explaining some of the mysteries of this place?" asked Frank.

"I will, as far as I dare to at present. Some day I will explain all I know, if we are successful in getting away from here."

"Well, then, the first thing I want to know is why the diamond Royal has in his possession is called the enchanted diamond?"

"Because it is supposed to be the keystone of the mysteries of the Rabanos country. As near as I can tell, it was lost about a hundred and fifty years ago, and the king made it known among his people that the person who found it should have granted any two requests he might choose to ask. John Gaul was a prisoner here at that time, or some time shortly after, he having reached this place by chance. He had a certain limit in which to go about, and he set about to find the lost diamond.

"After nearly twenty years' search he succeeded in finding it, and when he held it up before the king, his majesty, without first taking possession of the precious stone, told him to make the two requests he most desired, and they should be granted to him without delay.

"The king naturally supposed that the first request the man would make would be for his liberty, but in this he was mistaken. The first thing John Gaul asked for was the enchanted diamond!"

"The king was horrorstruck at this demand, but he had never been known to break a promise, and John Gaul was allowed to keep the precious stone.

"The second thing he asked for was his liberty, and this was promptly granted to him. Then, as he prepared to start to his own land, the late prisoner made a speech, which, as near as I can tell, went something like this:

"Your majesty, I will take the enchanted diamond to my home beneath the blue sky; and I will will it to my first male issue, who will come to this place some time and present it to you. But you shall be the first of your people to lay hands upon it, otherwise you will never touch it, and in time you will die, like the rest of the men that are born. Remember what I say! Farewell, ye who have lived since the beginning of time, and who are the father of all magic!"

"As he was leaving, the king requested him to seal the entrance of the passage that led to this country, and John Gaul promised to do so, saying that when the seal was broken it would be done by the diamond. You have the history of the enchanted diamond, and that is all I can tell you at present."

"A wonderful story!" exclaimed the professor.

"I can swallow all of it except one thing," observed Frank.

"And what is that?" asked Media.

"The part where you say this is the same king who lost the diamond one hundred and fifty years ago," was the reply. "According to your story, and what Sandis told us, the king is a blamed sight older than Methuselah would be if he were living now. Such a yarn as that will not go down with any intelligent American."

"Nor Irishman, either, bedad!" quickly added Danny Butler. "I do not believe that ther king is afther bein' as old as ther profissor, bedad!"

"Well, never mind about that part of it," said Royal. "Media is only telling us the story as she has heard it. The best thing for us to do is to listen to everything that we hear, and see all we can, and then keep quiet, and believe what we have a mind to."

"By Jove! Royal is right, as he always is," exclaimed Frank. "I shall not utter another word of a doubting nature if some one tells me that Danny is my grandmother."

"I think we had better get away as soon as possible," spoke up the professor; "if the king takes it in his head, he might make things very bad for us."

"After we have had a good sleep we will talk the matter over," said Royal. "Like Frank, I am anxious to find out some of the secrets of this place."

"You will find sleeping apartments in the next room," observed Media. "I know you have not slept in many hours, and you must be in need of it. When you awaken you will be served with a breakfast of meat and vegetables that abound in this underground country. Take good care of the enchanted diamond, and good care shall be taken of you!"

With these words the beautiful girl left the room, and our friends sought their couches.

CHAPTER VIII.

INTERVIEWING THE KING.

After a sleep of eight hours our hero and his companions felt much refreshed.

When they arose from their couches they made their toilets, and then repaired to the adjoining room.

All hands felt exceedingly hungry, and noticing a button protruding from a pillar in the center of the apartment, Royal promptly pressed it.

As he expected, a servant quickly appeared.

"We want our breakfast," said Frank, pointing to his mouth, and then rubbing his stomach, as if to impress the servant with the fact that it was empty.

He was understood, and with a bow the servant retired from the room.

Seated on the soft ottomans that were scattered about, our friends awaited the coming of their breakfast.

Presently they heard footsteps approaching through the passage outside.

The next moment the door opened, and in walked Media.

"I have come to breakfast with you," said the girl. "Your meal is being prepared now."

"You are welcome, I am sure," returned Royal. "Sit down, Media, and tell us if there is anything new."

"I have learned from one of the servants that the king is fast asleep, and has been for some hours."

"I must have a talk with him before we go," said Royal, in a thoughtful manner.

"I will go with you, and while you are talking to him I will endeavor to get hold of that book which contains the secrets of this place," returned Frank, alluding to a book which Media had told them of.

"Don't do anything that would excite him to wrath," Media suggested. "The king fears me, and if we can only keep him in that frame of mind all will be well."

As the girl ceased speaking, a servant entered bearing a huge tray, upon which was a steaming repast.

This was set upon a stone table at one side of the apartment, and as the four adventurers stepped to it at an invitation from Media, they saw five plates, each containing a brace of what appeared to be juicy mutton chops. On a large plate was a loaf of dark-looking bread.

"The meat of the underground goat," said Media, noticing the looks of inquiry that were cast upon her. "The bread is also made of grain that grows here."

"How does anything grow here when there is no sunshine to make it grow?" asked the professor.

"The strange light that infuses this place acts similar to the sun," was the rejoinder. "As it shines always, the growing plants are covered with a screen for a few hours out of every twenty-four. Though a trifle different in taste, what is grown here is fully as good as that which abounds in my own country of sunlight. Eat before the chops get cold; other things will be brought presently."

Being extremely hungry, they obeyed her, and before they had finished what was before them the servant again appeared, bearing another tray.

This contained vegetables resembling yams, some broiled steak, and five steaming vessels of a spicy-smelling liquid, not entirely unlike coffee.

"I guess we can be afther makin' a very decent meal," exclaimed Danny Butler. "This grub is much better than I was used ter atin' home in ther old country. They may be queer people in this big cave, but, bedad! they know what good livin' is!"

During the meal Media talked in a manner that showed that it was her desire to set out for the land of her people as soon as possible.

"Your horses have been well taken care of, and have had a good rest," said she, "so there is nothing to keep us here."

"Have you a horse, or do you propose to journey by means of the peculiar animals that pulled the long, car-like vehicle here ahead of us?" questioned the professor.

"I have horses in plenty," was the reply. "They are smaller, but fully as strong as your own. I will take two extra ones with me to carry away what I desire to take with me. Shall I get the animals ready?"

"Yes," returned Royal, "and while you are attending to it, we will make a call on the king."

"Be careful of the enchanted diamond," cautioned the girl. "If you get into any trouble or danger while you are out of my sight, draw it across the first piece of crystal that you see."

"All right," rejoined our hero, and then, after she had shown them the way, they set out to pay a visit to the king.

Reaching the door of his majesty's private chamber, Royal boldly knocked.

"What is the matter now?" exclaimed a sleepy voice from within. "Come in, and let's hear what is wanted."

Pushing the door open, the four entered.

The king had half risen from a couch, and as his eyes rested upon his callers he sprang to his feet.

"Easy, now!" exclaimed Royal. "We have not come here to harm or offend you; we simply want a few minutes' conversation with you."

"If that is the case, all right," returned the king.

"See here," said Royal, "I have got the diamond, and I am going to keep it. If you persist on getting possession of the diamond I will produce it, and test its qualities before your very eyes—probably to your sorrow, too."

"You talk as though you had as much power here as I have."

"I think I have."

"We shall see."

The king made a move to press a knob on a slab of marble at one corner of the room.

"Hold on!" cried Royal, covering the man with his revolver. "I don't believe that you are bullet-proof, are you?"

The king came to a halt with a scared look on his face.

What prompted him to do it Royal scarcely knew, but, drawing the enchanted diamond from his pocket, he started for the marble slab the king had moved for.

Upon the slab was a row of little knobs, and near them a triangular piece of crystal was imbedded.

With a quick movement our hero drew the diamond across the surface of the crystal.

The next instant the room was filled with a burst of sweet music, and the king sank to the floor, trembling as though with the ague!

CHAPTER IX.

THE START FOR THE LAND OF SUNLIGHT.

Royal and his friends were greatly astonished at the result of his drawing the diamond across the crystal.

The music was entrancing, and, standing spellbound in their tracks, they listened until it ceased.

As the last strain died out, Frank approached the form of the king, which was now lying motionless on the floor.

Whether it was from pure fright, or the effect of some magic spell, the man was unconscious.

"Pick him up, and put him on the divan over there," said Frank. "Now is my chance to look for that wonderful book."

"Do you think it would be right to take it?" asked the professor.

"I think it will add to our safety while in this underground country if we learn some of its mysteries," was the reply.

Without any further argument, Frank began searching about the apartment.

Presently he pushed a curtain aside, and found himself looking into a small alcove.

He beheld the very thing he was looking for lying on a slab, which appeared as though it was used for a desk.

There lay the manuscript book.

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Frank did not hesitate to walk into the alcove, and examine the book.

He saw that it was just what he wanted, and without hesitation Frank rolled up the book, and thrust it in his pocket.

When he left the alcove, the king was just coming to.

When he had strength enough to rise to a sitting posture, he exclaimed:

"I don't want your enchanted diamond! Take it, and leave the place as soon as you have a mind to. The instant you caused that music to play I felt as if I had a thousand needles sticking through the back of my neck. Don't practice with it any more."

"As you say," returned Royal. "We will leave you for a while, then. So long!"

The king of the Rabanos country nodded, and the four left his presence.

"I have got the book," whispered Frank, as they got into the passage outside.

"It can't be very large, since you have it in your pocket," said Royal.

"Only twenty or thirty pages of parchment," was the reply.

When they reached the room they had occupied since their arrival at the temple they found Media awaiting them.

"Our horses are ready," said she. "Shall we start for my country now?"

"Yes," returned our hero. "I guess it is about time we left this place."

Following the fair creature through a long hallway, they descended a flight of steps, and found themselves outside the temple in its rear.

There stood the four horses of our friends, ready to be mounted, and near them were three ponies with hair upon their bodies like a Newfoundland dog.

Two of the latter animals had heavy packs upon their backs, and the other had a curious-looking side saddle.

Media at once mounted this animal; as she sat there in the saddle waiting for her companions to follow her example, attired in a long crimson robe, and her head crowned with a turban-like hat, she made a striking, not to say beautiful, picture.

After a moment's gaze in mute admiration at her, the four vaulted into the saddles of their respective steeds, and the fair child of sunlight, leading the two pack ponies, bade them follow her.

Around to the front of the huge structure they made their way, and presently reached the point where the bridge ought to be.

"I will now explain one of the mysteries," exclaimed Media, dismounting as she spoke.

Drawing a small, round object from the folds of her cloak, she threw it upon the ground near the edge of the circular chasm.

The instant it struck the ground the thing exploded with a loud report, and the bridge quickly slid across.

"The bridge is kept directly beneath us," explained the girl, "and all that is needed is a shock to cause the bar, that holds it in place, to lift and allow it to slide over. Come! let us get over without delay."

At a sharp trot they crossed the bridge, the flaming torrent below causing them all a feeling of awe.

All hands, even Media, uttered a sigh of relief as they

reached the other side, and then throwing another ball upon the ground, an explosion followed, and the bridge disappeared from sight almost before the smoke died away.

"The worst part of our journey is accomplished," said Media. "I had fears that the king might cause the bridge to remain immovable, and thus keep us from getting across the fiery chasm. But he could not have anticipated our going so soon."

"He is no doubt glad that we have departed," returned Royal. "He told us that we were at liberty to go at any time."

"You still have the enchanted diamond in your possession?" questioned the girl.

"Yes."

"Be sure that you do not lose it. It may be very useful to us before our journey is ended."

Remembering what had happened before, Royal felt for the precious gem, and found that it was safe in its place.

As they drew away from the massive structure built inside the circular chasm of fire, the four adventurers noticed that there were no signs of habitations anywhere within sight.

On being questioned on this, Media said:

"The wonderful temple is built in the center of the Rabanos country; not one of the king's subjects live within a distance of two miles, but beyond that point they are located quite plentifully. We will have to pass through a section where many of them live, and if they offer to stop us I will simply cry out in their language that the lost diamond has been returned to the king, and that we have been endowed with power to go where we like."

"Have you any of the explosives the natives seem to be so well supplied with?" asked Frank.

"Yes; I have some that are harmless, and some that will kill any living thing it should chance to strike. I provided myself with the last named for the reason that our way leads through an underground forest, which is at least fifty miles long, and where dangerous animals abound in vast numbers."

"Forewarned is forearmed," observed the professor, examining his rifle and revolvers to see if they were ready for use.

His action was followed by the others, and then the little party of five proceeded on their way at a sharp trot.

It was not many minutes before they came in sight of a collection of stone buildings like those they saw before Sandis brought them to the king's temple.

The professor remarked that all of these were very ancient in appearance, and had unquestionably been constructed during the early ages.

At their appearance, a crowd of natives rushed out as if to intercept them, but Media cried out to them in their own language what she said she would, and they drew back, and, as the party passed, bowed low to the ground.

This thing happened a score or more times, and then the limits of habitations were reached.

As they rode along at this point our friends suddenly observed that they could see the roof of the vast cavern not over fifty feet above their heads.

They noticed, too, that the light that infused the underground place was gradually growing dim.

"Half a mile farther and we shall have reached the point where the roof that covers this country is within our touch," said Media.

They continued on until this distance was nearly covered, when they found that they could no longer see.

Frank lighted a lantern, but Media quickly eclipsed this by producing the sword she held in her hand when they first saw her, and causing a bright flame to burst from it.

The flaming sword was not such a wonder to them when she informed them that the blade and hilt were hollow, and filled with a powerful mineral oil.

For some time they proceeded along in silence, and then Royal suddenly gave a cry, and pointed ahead.

At the same time Media extinguished her light, and then our friends could scarcely believe their senses.

Through a glass-like covering over their heads they beheld the faint gleam of daylight!

CHAPTER X.

THE UNDERGROUND FOREST.

"Daylight?" cried Royal Henderson, questioningly; "it can't be, and yet—great Scott! it is, sure enough!"

"You are right," returned Media. "It is the light of day that you see. Advance a little farther, and you will be more astonished than ever."

Full of wonder and curiosity, they walked their horses full into the rays of light, which gave the atmosphere a tinge not unlike that of a foggy morning in the outside world.

Royal came to a halt, and reaching above his head, touched a smooth, glassy surface, through which the dull daylight came.

"This looks like a big window pane," said he.

"It is—a natural one; look out, and see what is in view," replied Media.

The four stared above them in a manner of deep interest, and presently the Irish lad gave a start, and yelled out:

"A fish, bedad! I see a fish, as sure as I am alive!"

"So do I!" echoed Frank. "Look! there are several of them."

"What are we looking into—the bottom of an aquarium?" asked Royal, turning to Media.

"You are looking into the sea," was the calm retort. "The Rabanos country is not only far under the ground, but beneath the sea as well. At this point the water is the deepest, and the only thing that prevents it from rushing in and filling this underground country is a layer of crystal, which, I have been told, is not over a score of inches in thickness."

"Wonderful! wonderful!" exclaimed Prof. Juggles, rolling his eyes in an ecstasy of delight. "We have made enough discoveries on this trip to fill a book. It is worth ten years of a man's life to see what we have seen!"

"The light we have here," went on the fair child of sunlight, "is caused by the rays of the sun, which penetrate the vast body of water over our heads."

At that moment it became so dark that they could scarcely see.

"What is the matter now?" exclaimed Frank.

"The sun has gone under a cloud, or else a floe of ice

has drifted in range of us upon the surface of the sea," said the girl.

"Let's be afther proceedin'," spoke up Danny, who was pretty badly worked up at what he saw and heard. "I will not be afther restin' easy till I stroike ther top of ther ground once more."

"Well, Danny, we will go on, if it is only to please you," said our hero, and the little party again started.

At the end of fifteen minutes they had passed beyond the daylight, and entered a passage that was not over a dozen feet in width.

Media's flaming sword lighted the way for them, but at the expiration of an hour they no longer needed this, for the same mysterious light that pervaded the vast cavern they had left behind them, shone upon them here.

"We are now about to enter the underground forests," exclaimed Media. "We must be on the lookout for dangerous wild beasts."

The four adventurers unslung their rifles to be in readiness for anything that might turn up, and kept a sharp lookout about them.

They had scarcely entered the forest when they were startled by hearing a series of explosions coming from a point back into the tangled maze of vegetation.

"A party of hunters, no doubt," said Media. "They make regular trips to the forest to obtain the meat they use. We must try and avoid them, if possible, for the probabilities are that Sandis is one of their number. We might not be able to get rid of him as easily as we did of the rest."

She had scarcely ceased speaking when a chorus of shouts came to their ears, intermingled with the angry roaring of some wild beasts, and the next instant they beheld a startling scene.

Rushing toward them at a frightful pace was a huge animal which somewhat resembled an ox, and behind it came a score or more of the natives of the Rabanos country.

The natives were hurling their explosives at the animal, but so great was its speed that they could not reach it.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Royal and Frank simultaneously drew their rifles to their shoulders, and taking aim at the creature's eyes, fired.

One of the shots certainly took effect, for the huge beast floundered about for a moment, and then fell to the ground in the agonies of death.

A yell of satisfaction went up from the pursuing natives, and rushing upon the fallen animal, one of their number quickly cut its throat so the blood could pour from its body.

Our friends immediately recognized this man as Sandis, who promptly arose, and approached them after he had finished his job.

He seemed to be greatly surprised at seeing our friends traveling in that direction, and asked whither they were going.

"We are going to see how far this underground country extends," replied Royal. "We have the permission of the king."

"How is it that the fair child of sunlight is with you?" questioned Sandis, turning a look of inquiry upon the girl.

"By the permission of the father of all magic, and my

own power, I go with the strangers from the outside world," returned Media.

"What proof have you that this you say is true?"

"Here is our passport!" exclaimed our hero, producing the enchanted diamond, and thrusting it before the eyes of Sandis. "Is that not enough proof?"

"It is," was the reply. "I would not stop your way without an order from the king."

The natives drew aside, and at a sharp trot the little party passed on, waving a mute farewell to them as they went.

Once out of sight of Sandis and his men, Media breathed a sigh of relief.

A narrow path led through the forest in a sort of trail-like fashion, and it was this that our friends were following.

When they had been traveling for eight long hours, the professor suggested that they should halt for rest and refreshment.

All hands were willing to do this, and they began looking about for a suitable spot to pitch their camp.

During the time since they had left Sandis they had met but few of the denizens of the underground forest, and these had fled at their approach.

Consequently they were all in excellent spirits when they dismounted near a perpendicular wall of rock, and made ready to feed their animals and themselves.

Danny built a fire from some dried, wood-like substances that were plentifully scattered about, and Media produced food from one of the packs the ponies had carried, and proceeded to cook dinner, as they chose to term the meal.

When their hunger had been satisfied they prepared to take things easy for an hour or two, when they proposed to resume their journey to the land of sunlight.

CHAPTER XI.

ROYAL IS CARRIED OFF BY A MONSTER.

Royal and Frank did not remain seated long after they had finished their meal. It occurred to them that it would be a good idea for them to take a little scout through the forest, and endeavor to shoot something for their next meal.

Media advised them not to stray far from the camp, and then picking up their rifles they set out.

"See here," observed Frank, as they got beyond the hearing of those in camp, "this thing is growing monotonous; it has been an hour or two since we have met with any sort of an adventure. We will have to hunt up something to stir us up."

Royal smiled.

"We have met with a few adventures since we left old Princeton," said he; "and we ought to be very thankful that we have escaped thus far with whole skins."

"I expect there is plenty more to go through before we get back home again," returned Frank. "That is, if we ever do get home again."

"Keep your eyes open!" exclaimed our hero, changing the subject. "Don't let any of the ugly beasts that inhabit this forest get the best of us."

With their weapons ready for instant use, the two boys

kept on their way through the semi-darkness of the forest.

Ten minutes passed without their meeting or seeing anything.

Then they were startled to hear a snort of terror, and the next instant a goat-like animal darted from a clump of bushes near them, and was away like a shot.

Royal brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired, bringing the animal down as neatly as you please.

"A good shot!" exclaimed his companion. "You was too quick for me, Royal; you fired before I thought of raising my rifle."

Without making any reply, Royal led the way to the spot where the slain creature had fallen.

Frank quickly drew his knife, and cut its throat, and then they proceeded to skin it.

This was but the work of a few minutes, and then, cutting off the best portions of the meat, they started to return to the camp.

They had scarcely made a step forward when, with a roar, a huge monster resembling an alligator, only it had several long claws protruding from its body, burst into view, and darted for the remains of the slain animal.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Royal, "what a looking creature!"

"We had better run," said Frank. "That fellow looks as though he would make an ugly fight."

The two darted from the spot. The horrible monster craned its long neck around, and observing them for the first time, uttered a bellow like that of an enraged bull.

The next instant it started after them with a swift, gliding motion.

In less than ten seconds the boys saw that it was gaining upon them.

But still they hurried on, still clinging to the fresh meat they desired to take into camp.

"Frank," exclaimed Royal, panting from his exertion, "we must kill that thing, or it will kill us!"

Frank nodded, and then both came to a halt.

Turning quickly, they leveled their rifles at the approaching monster and fired.

They expected to see it roll over in the agonies of death, but no such thing happened.

The bullets from their rifles seemed to have no effect upon the underground denizen.

Again they fired, with the same result.

A feeling of horror now came over them. Was the strange creature bullet-proof?

It seemed so, for not even did it slacken its speed.

It was now within twenty yards of the boys, and once more they started to flee from it.

In order to cover the ground at a more rapid gait they dropped the haunches of meat they carried, hoping, too, that this action on their part might cause the hideous monster to pause for an instant.

But they were disappointed. Instead of stopping, the creature increased its speed, and a minute later the boys could feel its hot breath fanning their necks.

Suddenly Royal stumbled, and fell to the ground.

Frank rushed a few yards farther, and then an agonized cry came to his ears.

Turning, the boy beheld the horrible denizen of the underground forest slowly making off with the body of

Royal Henderson firmly grasped in one of its huge claws.

A shudder came over Frank, and, sick at heart at the dreadful fate of his chum, he fell back against a rock in a faint.

How long he remained in that condition he could hardly conjecture, but it could not have been many minutes before he struggled to his feet and rubbed his eyes in a dazed manner.

"My God!" he groaned, as the vision of Royal's cruel fate came before him, "to think, after all we have passed through, that such a dreadful thing as this should happen! It is awful!"

The boy buried his face in his hands, and burst into tears.

Frank did not possess a faint heart, by any means, but that which had just happened was more than he could stand, and it was no wonder he broke down.

When ten minutes had passed, Frank recovered himself somewhat, and casting a look where he had last seen Royal in the clutch of the monster, he retraced his steps in the direction of the camp.

In a few minutes he reached it.

The face of Media turned pale when she saw that he was alone.

"Where is Royal—I mean Mr. Henderson?" she asked.

"Alas!" returned Frank, and then, with tears in his eyes, he quickly related what had happened.

A stifled cry of horror and dismay left the lips of the girl, which caused the drowsy professor to spring to his feet in alarm.

"What has happened?" he gasped, wildly, seizing his rifle.

"Happened?" echoed Danny Butler, who had been a silent listener. "Why, ther best man in ther party has been after bein' killed. Oh! if we had not been after comin' ter this quare place, this would not have happened!" and the Irish lad began wringing his hands and striding up and down, as though he was going to have a fit.

Media stood for the space of half a minute as though she were transfixed, and then, in a voice that was full of command, she exclaimed:

"Remain here—all three of you! Do not leave this spot under any condition. I will find Royal, and, if he is yet alive, bring him here."

Before a word of objection could be raised the girl was gone!

"What is to be done?" asked Frank, gazing about him sadly.

"Nothing," returned the professor. "You heard what Media said. It will not do to disobey her commands. She spoke as though she knew what she was talking about."

"She does, too," spoke up Danny. "Bedad! if any one can save Misther Royal it is herself that can do it! Ther girl is after bein' dead in love with ther poor fellow, or I don't know what I am sayin'."

Frank remained silent for a few moments.

"What Danny says is about right, professor," said he. "Anyhow, Media knows a great deal more about this place than we do. I think we had better do as she told us, and remain here for a reasonable time, anyhow."

"Did Royal appear to be alive when the monster carried him off?" asked the professor.

"Yes: the poor fellow was calling loudly for me to assist him, and I, with no more heart in me than a coward, fainted at the horrible sight. Oh, why did I not rush forward, and try to save him?"

"You acted wisely, even if you did faint," was the professor's reply. "Suppose the monster had got both of you in its clutches! How, then, could we know what became of you?"

"Maybe ther craythure will not kill him," interposed the Irish lad. "Miss Media must have been after thinkin' something like that, or she would not have gone ter look for him."

"You speak sound sense, Danny," and the professor at once put on a more hopeful look.

Replenishing the fire, which had become low, the three sat down to await developments.

There was really no need of a fire, as it was both light and warm enough, but the blaze seemed to put a more cheerful aspect upon their surroundings, and eased their feelings to a slight degree.

The minutes frittered by, and at length an hour passed, but Media had not got back.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ISLAND OF ROCK.

It would be impossible to depict the feelings of Royal Henderson as the horrible underground monster thrust out its huge claw and clutched him about the body.

The fall had partially stunned him, but not sufficient for him to be unconscious of what was taking place.

As the monster started away with him, he uttered a yell for help in a terrified voice. Then he saw Frank stagger backward and fall to the ground.

This was sufficient to cause the boy to faint, also, which was greatly to his benefit.

When he returned to consciousness, he found himself lying on the ground in a dimly lighted cave.

As he opened his eyes, a shudder passed through his frame, and, not daring to move, he glanced about him.

The first thing his eyes rested upon was a truly appalling sight.

At the entrance of the cave he saw the monster that had carried him away.

But that was not all! Another just like it was also there, and the two were engaged in battle.

"They are fighting for me!" thought the boy, with a feeling of horror. "Heavens! is there no way for me to escape?"

He quickly comprehended that he could not leave the cave, for the fighting monsters blocked his way.

But something must be done, and that right away!

"Oh, if I only knew where to shoot them so as to strike a vital spot, I would do so at once!" groaned the boy.

Not daring to remain inactive any longer, he sprang noiselessly to his feet.

The two underground denizens paid not the least attention to his movements.

His rifle was still slung to his back, and the next moment he had the muzzle of it leveled at one of the monster's horrible-looking eyes.

Crack! As Royal pulled the trigger the unearthly looking thing relaxed its hold upon its opponent, and began struggling in the throes of death.

As quick as a flash the muzzle of his weapon was turned upon the other.

Again he fired.

But he missed his mark, for the bullet struck a hard, shell-like substance about two inches above the creature's left eye.

With a wild roar it turned upon him.

Before our hero could fire another shot, a lurid flame flashed before his eyes, which was instantly followed by a deafening report, and he was thrown to the ground.

He regained his feet as quickly as he could, and then a cry of joy escaped his lips.

In the mouth of the cave stood Media, the child of sunlight!

As our hero's eyes drifted from her to the spot where the monster had been, he saw that it had literally been blown to atoms by the explosion.

"Royal! Alive!" exclaimed Media; and then, unable to restrain herself, she threw herself in Royal's arms.

As the beautiful pale face of the girl rested on his shoulder, the boy impulsively pressed a kiss upon her lips.

"Royal!" cried Media, in a tone of half pleasure, half fright.

"I couldn't help it, Media; I love you!" was his quick reply. "You saved my life, and then threw yourself in my arms, and—and—well, I kissed you."

"I am satisfied," said the fair child of sunlight. "When you say that you love me I believe you, and—I am so happy! If you had been dead when I found you, I believe I would have died also."

Once again their lips met, and the two lovers plighted their troth upon the very spot where, a few minutes before, two of the most hideous monsters the human mind could dream of had been engaged in mortal combat.

"Come!" said Media, softly, "let us get back to the camp before more of the terrible things come after us. Your friends are anxious about you."

"Did they remain in camp, and allow my darling to come to look for me all alone?" asked Royal, in surprise.

"They did, because I commanded them to do so," was the retort.

Arm in arm the two hastened for the camp, both keeping a sharp lookout for danger.

"You still have the enchanted diamond safe in your possession?" asked Media.

"Yes, and I have a sweetheart, too, which is more than I could say a few minutes ago."

The girl blushed, but said nothing.

As they neared the camp they saw Frank and the professor approaching them.

The two could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw Royal alive and unhurt.

Frank uttered a genuine college yell, and rushed forward and clasped his chum in his arms.

"I am ashamed of myself, old fellow," said he. "I showed the white feather when your life was in danger."

"No, you didn't," returned our hero. "Your breaking down at that moment shows how much you thought of

me. Don't say anything more about it. It is all right now, isn't it, Media?"

"Yes," said the fair girl, "I was in time."

"I would suggest that we get out of this dangerous forest as soon as possible," spoke up the professor, after he had shaken our hero heartily by the hand.

"Yes," chimed in Media, "we will start at once, and will not halt again until we strike the light of day."

"Will we get to your place as soon as that?" asked Royal.

"No; but we will be forced to journey a short distance on the earth's surface, and then go on underground again. My country is yet a long way off."

"About how long will it take us to reach it?"

"In three days from the time we started we will be there, allowing time for rests."

"We have not made quite half the distance, then," observed Frank.

"No; when we next come to a halt, in the light of day, as I have said, we will be just about one-third of the way to my country."

Danny saddled the horses, and five minutes later they mounted and started on their way as swiftly as the animals could carry them.

The hours flitted by, and still they kept on, sometimes allowing the horses to come down to a walk, and at others pushing them to the top of their speed.

They saw but few animals of any size on their way, and fortunately no more of the hideous monsters appeared.

At length they came to the end of the underground forest, and all hands breathed a sigh of relief.

About a mile outside the forest they came to the limit of the underground country.

But a passage continued on, and lighting their lanterns, they pressed forward through this.

They soon found that the passage ran upward, and in many places the horses had all they could do to climb it.

For three long hours they toiled up the ascent, and then they suddenly discovered daylight ahead of them.

Media, with our hero by her side, led the way from the passage, and a few minutes later they were in the open air.

"Hooray!" yelled Danny Butler; "we are afther bein' out of ther grave at last, bedad!"

The sky was of a leaden hue, and a cold, damp wind was blowing, but our friends did not mind this in the least, so glad were they to be upon the earth's surface once more.

At any other time the scene they were now gazing upon would have appeared bleak and desolate, and anything but inviting, but now it looked beautiful to them.

Dark-gray rocks abounded on every hand, and in their shadows lay patches of snow and ice. Here and there a light growth of a pale-green moss could be seen growing from the chinks, but beyond this not the least sign of vegetation could be discerned.

So cold was the air that all hands began to shiver, and at the suggestion of Royal they dismounted and climbed upon one of the huge rocks to get a better view of their surroundings.

As they reached the summit a simultaneous cry of surprise came from the lips of all hands save Media.

From their point of observation they found that they

were upon a small island, which appeared to be composed entirely of rocks; on all sides of which was a body of dark-green water, dotted here and there with ice floes and bergs.

"Why, where are we, anyway?" gasped the professor.

"That's what I'd like ter know, beggin' yer pardon, sir, for interruptin' yer!"

As these words were spoken the figure of a man, who was evidently a sailor, appeared on a small, flat rock below them.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAND OF SUNLIGHT.

"Don't be afeared of me," went on the man who had so suddenly appeared before them. "But for God's sake! give me somethin' ter eat, if yer have anything with you!"

"Certainly," returned Royal, quickly recovering from his astonishment. "Wait until we can get down there by you."

"I'm all alone on this island of rock!" exclaimed the stranger, feverishly. "I ain't tasted of anything but raw seal meat in six days, an' I am pretty nigh froze for ther want of a fire!"

"Poor man," said Media, in a voice of sympathy. "He is one of your countrymen, is he not?"

"Yes," returned Frank; "he is an American sailor, beyond a doubt. Probably the survivor of a wrecked sealer."

Meanwhile, our friends were hurrying to get down to the man, who did not seem to have strength enough to get to them.

In a minute or two they succeeded in reaching him, and the professor promptly tendered him a flask of brandy.

A draught of its contents appeared to put new life in the poor fellow, and, dropping upon his knees, he thanked them with tears in his honest gray eyes.

"Come," said Royal, "we will give you something to eat in a minute," and they promptly conducted him to the spot where they had left their horses.

There were plenty of eatables in the pack on the pony's back, and soon the man was devouring the food given him in a ravenous manner.

When he had eaten a sufficient quantity he washed his meal down with another pull at the professor's brandy flask, and then, at Media's suggestion, they drew back into the passage, where it was warmer, to hear the poor fellow's story.

"My name is Billy Yamble; I was born in ther State of Connecticut, but live in Oakland, California, when I am ter home," began the wrecked sailor. "I was one of ther crew of ther sealer *Jane Ann*, which foundered on this here island of rock jist six days ago.

"I was ther only one as was saved, an' how I managed ter live I don't know. Ther ship struck in a heavy fog, an' afore we knew it we was all in ther ice-cold water.

"I managed ter get ter ther shore somehow, an' since that time I've been a-livin' on ther flesh of a dead seal I found on ther beach. I found a cave, an' jist managed ter keep from freezin' by stayin' in it most all ther time.

"I was jist gettin' ready ter die, an' end my misery, when I heard your voices. Ther cave I was in is only a few feet from where yer first seed me. That's all there is of my story, but every word of it are ther gospel truth!"

"You have had a hard time, sure enough," exclaimed Royal.

"I have, sir."

Just then a sudden thought struck the sailor, and in a voice that was half surprise, half alarm, he asked:

"How is it that you people are on this God-forsaken rock? an' with horses an' things ter eat, too? Yer wasn't wrecked, were yer?"

"No," replied the professor. "We came here on horseback."

Billy Yamble drew back in a superstitious manner.

"What d'ye mean?" he gasped.

"Just what I say," said the professor. "Don't be alarmed, my good fellow. We are only human, like yourself."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" ejaculated the man. "I won't say that I doubt yer, 'cause it ain't policy for me ter pick up an argyment with people that has done me ther best turn of my life."

This caused our friends to laugh, and then Billy Yamble looked more puzzled than ever.

"Well," spoke up Media, with a shiver, as she turned to her companions, "what do you think of the outside world at this point?"

"Not much," returned Royal. "From what we have seen, and the description this man gives of this island of rock, I think we had better get away from it as soon as possible."

Even the Irish lad agreed on this point, and at once mounted his horse.

"D'ye mean ter say that yer are a-goin' ter ride away from here on ther horses, ther same as yer say yer come?" asked Billy Yamble.

"Yes, and you must accompany us if you wish to save your life," said Royal. "We have an extra pony that you can ride."

"Well," and the man scratched his head; "I'll go with yer—as far as yer go, which, I reckon, won't be very far."

The pack of provisions that one of the extra ponies carried was removed and divided into packages of six, each being allotted one of these to carry, and then the sailor was assisted to mount the animal.

All being in readiness, Media led the way into the open air once more.

Straight for the western end of the rocky island she rode, and when about two hundred yards had been covered, they came to a slight descent.

The mouth of a cave loomed up before them, and into this they rode, single file.

"Light the lanterns!" exclaimed Media. "I will save my light until yours are exhausted."

The professor and Danny quickly obeyed, and then they rode into a passage similar to the one they had lately emerged from, which started from the rear of the cave.

Billy Yamble did not utter a word until fully fifteen minutes had passed, and then he remarked that "this beat anything he ever sawed."

The passage led downward, and the farther they proceeded the warmer the air became.

"We will go on for four hours, and then halt for a rest," said Media. "This passage leads directly to my country, and there are no more dangers to encounter on the way, since no human beings or beasts live here."

"I am glad of that, bedad!" exclaimed the Irish lad.

Four hours was quite a long while to journey, when it is taken into consideration that they had already been a long time in the saddle; but all were anxious to get to their destination.

Billy Yamble was completely "knocked out," as he put it, by what he heard about the wonderful underground country, and he was continually making quaint remarks as they proceeded on their way.

When the four hours were up they were no longer going downward, but were traversing a level stretch.

Reaching a part of the passage that was a little wider than they had yet seen, they came to a halt.

Food for man and beast was served out, and then, there being no need of keeping watch, all hands sought the seclusion of their blankets and went to sleep.

Six hours later they arose, and after eating, again resumed their journey.

This is the way they kept it up, and finally, after a long, weary journey, they came in sight of the light of day.

"At last!" cried Media, her cheeks glowing with excitement. "After two long years I see my native place. Push on, friends! You will be welcome among my people!"

"This country must lie very low," mused the professor. "I cannot see that we have ascended a slope since we came down from the island of rock. I should judge that we must now be at least half a mile below the level of the sea."

His meditations were suddenly cut short by a wild shout from those who preceded him.

He was the last to come forth from the mouth of the passage, and the sight that lay before him caused a feeling of exhilaration to shoot through his frame.

They had emerged into a vast valley that appeared like a stretch of country in the North Temperate Zone. Luxuriant vegetation could be seen on every hand, and the bright sun, which shone upon it in all his splendor and glory, made a scene long to be remembered to each and every one in the party of six!

"This is my country!" proudly exclaimed the child of sunlight. "It is from here that I was taken two years ago by the king of the Rabanos country, who is now dead, in spite of the fact that he claimed to have lived since the beginning of time. In the name of my people, I welcome you to the land of sunlight!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANK'S TERRIBLE MISHAP.

It was indeed a glorious picture that lay before our friends, and as Media ceased speaking they turned their eyes upon it, and with one accord breathed a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"We have just left a wonderful underground country that is worth twenty years of a man's life to see; but,

after all, there is nothing like the outside world, with its green foliage and the blue canopy of the heavens overhead," observed the professor, in a voice of profound solemnity.

"You are right, professor," replied Royal. "And now, Media, as you say we are welcome to this sunny land, will you lead us to your people?"

"I surely will," exclaimed the girl. "Do you see that grand forest over there?"

She pointed to a luxuriant growth of trees about four miles from the spot where they had emerged into the valley, and all hands quickly acknowledged that they saw it.

"Beyond that lies my home," she went on. "There is nothing peculiar or mysterious there; my people are pure, simple-minded folks, and that is why they have long allowed themselves to live under the tyranny of the underground king. The passage through which we have just come is the only outlet to this beautiful valley, and my people know of no other human beings than the inhabitants of the Rabanos country and themselves."

"In what part of the world are we, anyway?" asked Frank.

"I do not know," retorted Media. "What little I learned of the great world we live in while an inmate of the temple in the underground country, did not give me knowledge of any of the divisions of land. I only know that the country of the Rabanos, for the most part, is not only underground, but beneath a vast body of water as well. When you first entered the underground world you were on the other side of the icy water, now you are on this."

"We are in Asia!" exclaimed the professor.

"At the North Pole, more likely," rejoined Frank.

"No; I agree with the professor; we are in Asia," spoke up our hero. "We have been traveling almost due west ever since we started."

"Then we have journeyed from Alaska to Asia on horseback?"

"We certainly have."

"It would never do to have that published in the papers when we get home; the people would not believe it," said Royal, with a laugh.

"It is true, nevertheless," reaffirmed the professor.

"Bedad, I belave, if we were afther stroikin' one more underground passage, we would fetch up in Ireland!" exclaimed Danny.

"This is the only passage that leads to or from this valley," said Media, quickly. "Come, Royal! I will conduct you to the home I was torn away from two years ago."

Urging their horses forward, they started through the valley.

The animals seemed to be endowed with new life, and though they must certainly have been pretty well tired out, they started forward as freshly as though they had just been saddled and bridled, after a long rest.

Media and Royal led the way over a wide trail, which looked as though it had not been traversed in a long while.

As they rode along hares and other small animals darted across their path, and gayly plumaged birds flitted from tree to tree as they were disturbed by the party.

In half an hour's time they had reached the forest, and were nearly through it.

"In five minutes we will come in sight of the habitations of my people," said Media. "But in order to reach them a narrow path must be traversed, which runs by the side of a steep bluff on one hand, and a lake on the other. It is plenty wide enough for our horses to proceed in double file; but we must be careful, as the lake is bottomless, and the water is so peculiar that a person is unable to swim in it. Several of my people have fallen in the lake, and none of them ever came to the surface after once disappearing from view."

"I think there is something a trifle mysterious about your country, after all," returned our hero. "That lake must certainly be a queer body of water."

"We will see it presently. Ah! look ahead! there is the home of my people."

They had reached the edge of the forest, and following the direction Media's outstretched hand indicated, they beheld a vast collection of thatch-roofed, one-story houses.

The village, or city, as it might be called, was built on the side of a gentle slope, and though it had not been laid out with any degree of exactness, it looked pretty, and even grand to the eyes of the party of adventurers.

"That town looks ter be comfortable enough," observed Billy Yamble, who had not ventured to speak in a long while. "Ther place looks from here as though it might be a sort of wind-up place for fellows that has worked hard all their lives. I reckon if that town is what I imagine it is, I'll never leave it. I've had enough of travelin' under ther ground."

Our friends cast a look of surprise at the sailor. They had not expected to hear such sentiments from him. For though he spoke very plainly, there was a depth of meaning in his tone, as though his soul had already reached the distant city.

With their eyes fixed on the home of the fair child of sunlight, which was yet over a mile distant, the little party pressed on.

Presently they came in sight of the lake Media had spoken about, and all hands became very curious.

It was an expanse of water covering probably five or six hundred square feet, and was quite natural in appearance.

As they neared the narrow path that ran along its edge Media again cautioned them to be very careful and not allow their horses to miss their footing.

The dangerous place did not extend over three hundred feet, and all hands felt equal to the task of getting over it in safety.

But Media must have had grave fears on this point, for when they reached the commencement of the narrow place she dismounted, and asked her companions to do likewise.

They all obeyed readily enough.

"It is safer to lead the horses than it is to ride them," said she. "The water looks natural and innocent enough, but once you fall in, that is the last will ever be seen of you."

Not one in the party felt that there was any danger; but, acting on the girl's advice, they proceeded very cautiously.

"In a very few minutes we will be among my peo-

ple," observed Media, keeping a sharp eye upon those who were following her, to see that they did not make a misstep. "Once across this narrow path, and all danger is over. How surprised my relatives and friends will be to see me—I, that they think is even now the queen of the Rabanos country, and doomed to a certain death."

"We will endeavor to teach your people not to allow the inhabitants of the underground country to rule them," said Royal. "Is our language spoken here?"

"It is not," was the reply. "But I will translate what you have to say. I fear, though, that they will not listen to you in that matter. They are not a warlike race, and have never made the least effort to resist the underground people when their king came here to pick out a new wife."

"It is never too late to begin," spoke up Frank.

"Bedad!" exclaimed Danny Butler, "by ther looks of ther houses over there, I am afther thinkin' that there must be enough men here ter clane out ther entoire underground country."

"That is a fact," nodded the professor. "For once, Danny, I will agree with you."

By this time they were more than halfway over the dangerous path, and Media was beginning to feel more easy.

Suddenly Frank's horse became obstinate, and refused to be led farther.

"What is the matter, old fellow?" said the boy, coaxingly. "Come on, now!"

But the horse refused to move ahead. For some queer reason, it concluded to go back.

Frank pulled sharply upon the bridle rein, and as he did so the headstall, which had become loosened in some manner, came off. This made the boy stagger backward, and before a hand could be stretched out to save him, he tumbled headlong from the narrow path into the waters of the lake.

There was a sharp splash, and Frank disappeared from sight.

A cry of horror went up from the boy's companions, and, acting on a sudden impulse, which was quite natural, Royal tore off his coat, and made a move as though to spring into the lake, and rescue his chum.

"Hold!" cried Media, in a frightened tone. "Would you, my promised husband, also perish? Is it not sufficient that we should lose one of our party? Do not touch that water, I implore you. All the powers on earth cannot save your friend. See! he does not even arise to the surface!"

The girl's voice was half commanding, half entreating, and as Royal looked into her eyes he gave in to her.

Speechless and with faces of marble, the five hurried over the dangerous place, and reached a safe spot on the other side, leaving the horse which had caused the loss of Frank standing upon the narrow path in an attitude of extreme fear.

CHAPTER XV.

FRANK IN A FRIGHTFUL SITUATION.

Frank lost his footing so suddenly, that before he realized what had happened he tumbled into the lake.

Down he went for half a dozen feet or more, and then he struck out with all his strength to reach the surface.

But a strange, irresistible force seemed to drag him from the spot, all the while holding him down.

A feeling of horror shot through him as he realized this fact, and what Media had said regarding the lake flashed through his mind.

"But I must not die this way!" he thought, and then, with a superhuman effort, he slowly forced his way toward the surface.

When he once got started it seemed to be easier, and in a very few seconds his head emerged from the water.

But, to his astonishment and dismay, he found himself in total darkness!

Fortunately he could breathe, and that was the main consideration.

Encumbered as he was, with his clothing and the rifle slung upon his back, Frank had all he could do to keep his head above water.

But an exclamation of relief soon left his lips, for, after swimming a few strokes, his hand suddenly came in contact with a rock.

Making a grab upward, he succeeded in getting hold of the rock, and then, after a short rest, he gradually drew himself upon it.

"So far, so good," he muttered. "But where, in the name of everything wonderful, am I?"

After a moment's thought, he concluded to investigate.

Drawing his waterproof match safe from his pocket, he produced a match, and struck it.

As the flame flared up, he saw that he was seated on a ledge of rock which was not over ten feet wide and thirty feet long.

But that was not all that he saw! As his eyes pierced the gloom beyond the radius of light, he beheld a human skeleton sitting bolt upright on the ledge of rock, with its spinal column resting against a wall.

Frank was so startled by this unexpected sight that the match dropped from his hand, and was extinguished.

"Great heavens!" he ejaculated. "Am I to come to such a fate as that?"

When he had sufficiently regained his composure he lit another match, and arose to his feet.

A second look soon showed him that the skeleton that had so startled him was not alone.

Stretched on either side of it were several more, and as Frank surveyed them by the flickering light the match made, a shudder ran over him.

"What a fate!" he muttered. "These are the remains of some of the people who have fallen in the lake, I have no doubt. They were drawn into this cave by a strong under current, like myself. Well, if they remained here on the ledge until they died of starvation, I shall not, anyway. I am going to try and get out of here, and that at once."

As the boy ceased speaking a blank look came upon his face. He was going to try and get out, but how should he begin? He knew it was impossible for him to swim out of the blind cave, and yet, how else could he get out?

It occurred to Frank that he had better sit down, and think over his situation.

Dropping down upon the portion of rock where he stood, he struck another match.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, quickly extinguishing it; "it

is better to be in the darkness than to have those horrible relics of humanity before my eyes!"

For the space of half an hour he remained seated there in the Stygian darkness.

Then he arose to his feet.

He had formed a resolve, and was going to try and carry it out.

Without further ado he stripped off the most of his clothing, and deposited the articles on the ledge.

He was now attired in his trousers and shirt only.

"I must swim against that current, or die!" he muttered, setting his teeth hard together. "Here goes!"

With a mighty spring, he dove into the depths of the black waters, and began swimming away from the ledge with all his might.

He succeeded in gaining a few feet, and then he strove to reach the surface.

But his efforts were in vain. Though he struggled manfully, in less than half a minute he was back against the ledge in the cave.

As his head emerged from the water, he gave a groan of despair.

"I am doomed to die, after all!" he cried. "But I will make one more effort, for while there is life there is hope."

Clambering out upon the ledge again, he took a short rest, and then donned his clothes.

"I will try and dig myself out of here," he thought.

Picking up his rifle, he began sounding the wall the skeleton was leaning against.

For the most part it was of solid rock, and he failed to gain any encouragement by his experiment.

But suddenly he struck a spot—right near the seated skeleton, too—that was of earth, and gave forth a hollow sound.

An exultant cry came from the boy's lips, and utilizing the stock of his rifle as a battering-ram, he began pounding upon the spot as hard as he could. After a while the wall of earth gave way with a crash.

The moment it did so, the cave was flooded with a stream of daylight!

CHAPTER XVI.

AT MEDIA'S HOME.

It was with sad hearts that the party continued on their way to the city.

Not a word was spoken until they came in sight of some people dressed in modern garments, and quite civilized in appearance.

The moment they beheld the five strangers riding toward them the natives made a move to retire, appearing to be quite frightened.

"We will keep right on," said Media. "Not a man will offer to harm us; they fear us, instead."

"Where do you propose to stop at?" asked Royal.

"I am going direct to the house of my father," was the reply. "I will tell my story to him, and he, in turn, will inform the people of the city. That will be the quickest way of letting them know all about us."

"That is so," nodded the professor.

Once into the little city they came in contact with many people, none of whom attempted to stop their progress.

The inhabitants of the land of sunlight, as Media chose to call it, seemed to regard the strangers in about the same way as a flock of school children take in a circus procession.

At length Media drew rein before one of the houses.

She had scarcely done so when there was a cry, and an elderly woman dashed from the house, and caught the girl in her arms.

It was her mother!

Royal and his companions remained silent until the two females got through embracing, and then they dismounted.

"Come, Royal," said Media, "I have told my good mother all, and I will introduce you as—as—"

"As your intended husband," exclaimed our hero. "Don't be bashful about it, Media."

With a blushing face the fair girl managed to get through with it, and then the others were made acquainted with her mother.

"What did your mother say when you told her you was going to be my wife?" asked Royal, when they had entered the house.

"That you are a thousand times better than the great king of the underground country."

"I am glad she thinks well of me. But, say, Media, where is your father?"

"Alas! my mother says that he died soon after I was taken from here; and the only brother I had is dead also."

"Then your mother has been occupying the house alone?"

"Yes."

"Probably she could take us in as boarders, then; I am sure we have enough money to stop here a few weeks."

"Money is unknown in this country—as much so as it is in the Rabanos country. You will all stop here as long as you see fit."

The afternoon was well advanced when they arrived at the strange city, and by the time the necessary explanations had been made, the shades of night were upon them.

When they got up from a table, after eating a substantial meal, it was quite dark.

"Now," observed Royal, "if Frank was only here I should feel happy and contented."

A look of sadness came over the faces of his companions.

"We must try and find his body, and give it decent interment," said the professor, after a pause.

"Yes, to-morrow morning that shall be our first duty."

"You will take some experienced men with you, then," spoke up Media. "The lake is too dangerous for you to venture near without some one to guide you."

As the girl ceased speaking there came a sudden knock on the door.

It was promptly opened by her mother, and the next instant Frank Mercer burst into the room!

The shout of joy that left the lips of our friends when they beheld their companion alive and well really astonished the natives that were within hearing distance.

In order to explain Frank's appearance we will go back to the point where we left him in the cave.

As the stream of daylight flooded the cave, Frank could scarcely believe his senses. The hole had been forced through so easily that he could hardly bring himself to believe that he had done it.

For a moment he remained motionless in his tracks, and then with a wild bound he sprang forward, and peered through the hole.

The sight he saw was a pleasant one, for before him stretched a ravine that was truly picturesque and beautiful.

Through the bottom of the ravine a good-sized stream flowed, and Frank at once came to the conclusion that it was the outlet of the lake he had fallen into.

The sun was not much over an hour high, and casting a last look at the grawsome objects in the cave, the boy forced himself through the hole.

Once outside he saw that he had emerged from the side of the ridge of ground, and that he was now in a place that appeared as though it might be difficult to get out of.

"I'll follow the course of the stream for a little distance, and maybe I'll find an easy way to leave this ravine," muttered Frank, and he accordingly started.

After five minutes' walk he rounded a bend in the ravine, and saw an easy, sloping ascent to his right.

"I guess I am all right now," he muttered. "I wonder what has become of the rest? They think I am dead, I suppose, since I failed to rise to the surface of the lake. Well, I'll surprise them shortly."

In a very short time Frank had reached the level ground above, and, without any hesitation, he made his way back to the ledge he had fallen from.

His horse was nowhere to be seen, so he was forced to strike out for the city on foot.

As the boy neared it he met several of the natives, from whom he learned by signs that his friends had preceded him.

It took him some time, however, to find the house they were stopping at; but he finally did, and entered it in the manner already described.

"You escaped from the lake!" exclaimed Media, in astonishment. "It seems impossible. Tell us what happened to you."

"I will, with pleasure," returned Frank. "When I slipped and fell into the lake I met with about as strange an adventure as I have encountered since leaving college. I am also able to explain why it is that a person who falls into the lake from the narrow path never comes up again. There is nothing very mysterious about it, after all."

The boy then proceeded to relate what had happened to him, and, when he had finished, all hands voted him a hero.

"Do you know," observed the professor, after Frank had eaten his supper, "that we are the luckiest mortals on the face of the globe?"

"Something like that, I guess," returned Frank. "Here we are in some part of Asia," went on the man of learning; "but exactly what part I don't know. We have journeyed from Alaska to Asia on horseback, and passed through a wonderful underground country that is as full of mystery as an egg is full of meat. Now, I want to make a suggestion."

"What is it, professor?" asked Royal.

"It is that we explore this valley, and find a way to get out of it, so that we may be able to discover where we are."

"No explorin' for me!" exclaimed Billy Yamble. "This place are good enough for me, an' I don't intind ter lave it if I can get anythin' to do here."

"You are master of yourself," said the professor, "and can do as you see fit."

"I'll never go inter any more underground passages ag'in, anyhow," replied the sailor, with a dogged shake of his head.

"I'm willin' ter go most anywhere if I kin get home ag'in," spoke up Danny. "Bedad, I have been after gettin' used ter quare things."

"I think your suggestion is a good one," said Royal. "I will be one to go with you on a tour of investigation, after we have had a few days' rest."

"I am with you," chimed in Frank.

This being decided upon, the party settled down to take things easy for a few days.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOST IN THE SNOW.

For over a week our friends rested in the city of the land of sunlight, which was called Akarn.

They found the inhabitants to be a very thrifty set of people. They worked long and earnestly to plant and gather in their crops, so they might live in comfort during the wet season.

The tools used by them were very primitive, and their dress was of the plainest.

Royal and Frank began to pick up their language very rapidly, and in less than a week they could make themselves understood by any of the natives.

The chums endeavored to learn from them what division of the earth their land was situated upon. But the natives knew nothing of geography, and had believed, until our friends came there, that the underground country and their own constituted the whole earth.

That was all the information they could get from any one they chanced to ask.

But one day they came across an old man who looked a great deal like a native of Russia, and to him they began plying questions.

He answered about the same as the rest had done, until finally Royal got the professor to speak to him in the Russian language.

The effect was wonderful! The old fellow seized the professor's hand, and nearly wrung it from his arm.

Then the two conversed for nearly an hour, and when they were through the professor stated to the boys that the man was really a Russian, who had escaped from the mines of Siberia over thirty years before. He had been exiled to that place for some petty offense against the Russian Government, and had succeeded in escaping after he had been there but a few months.

The land of sunlight was in Siberia, he said—near the northeast coast.

This was the first time he had divulged where he had come from, and he hoped the newcomers would keep his secret.

The three shook him warmly by the hand, and assured him that they would.

"He knows a way to get out of this valley other than the underground passage," said the professor. "He informs me that those snow-capped mountains that surround us are not mountains at all, but the level, cold country of Siberia. This valley is situated many feet below the level of the sea, and hence the mildness of the climate here."

"Ask him if he will show us the way to get out of the valley," said Royal. "Tell him that we have not decided to leave by that way, but are curious to find out where we are."

The professor promptly translated this to the Russian, who was a man of seventy, Mazouvitch by name.

At first he seemed to be alarmed at the request, but after the professor had talked to him for a while he consented.

"He is afraid that we might take him back to the horrors of the Siberian mines," observed Frank.

"He need not fear on that score," replied Royal. "If the country is as bleak and desolate up there as he leads us to believe, I am not in favor of attempting to leave by that way."

"Nor I," chimed in the professor. "I would rather risk going through the underground country to Alaska, than to run the chances of being frozen to death."

Our friends got on the best of terms with Mazouvitch, and a few days later they had completed their preparations to start on their exploring tour, with him as their guide.

Media was loath to see Royal go away without her, but when he repeatedly assured her that he would not run in any needless danger, she reluctantly gave her consent.

The girl's mother and the professor seemed to be a trifle affected when they parted, too, and Frank made the remark to Danny Butler that it looked as though the elderly couple were sweet on each other.

The Irish lad grinned, and allowed that the woman was, by far, the best looking of the two.

It was a bright morning when the party set out.

They were well equipped for the tour of investigation they proposed to make, and started on foot, according to the advice of the Russian.

As Billy Yamble refused to go with them, their party consisted of but five—Royal, Frank, the professor, Danny Butler and Mazouvitch.

They started due southwest, and by noon had nearly reached the foot of the seeming mountain range.

After making a meal from some rabbits and birds they shot on their way, they kept on until they reached the sloping ascent.

When night overtook them they were not much more than halfway up.

The air was cold, too, and they soon found it necessary to pitch their camp and start a fire.

They found a sheltered spot that suited their purpose, and made themselves comfortable for the night.

After the evening meal the Russian entertained them with some stories of the horrors the Russian exiles were subject to.

"I think if I were a native of Russia I would certainly

leave the country and go to America, the land of the free!" exclaimed Royal. "It does not seem possible that such horrible things can really happen, but yet they are true, for I have often read of them in the daily papers."

"And when a man who has been exiled to Siberia relates his experiences it seems more horrible than reading an account of some such thing," added Frank.

The five managed to pass a fairly comfortable night, and when morning dawned they ate a hasty breakfast and resumed the ascent.

Shortly before noon they reached the top, and, as the Russian had said, found themselves gazing over a bleak, snow-covered country.

The air was piercing cold, and it showed signs of snowing in the near future.

But they had provided themselves with extra clothing, and so got along very well.

"For the novelty of the thing, I propose that we take a walk of a mile or two over the snow," said our hero.

"Agreed!" exclaimed Frank.

The Russian shook his head.

"It is going to snow very shortly," said he; "and when it snows in this latitude it does it for fair. I would not advise taking a walk, or going away from where we now are."

"Nonsense," laughed the professor. "If it begins snowing we can come right back, and then go on down to the valley."

"All right; I will do as the rest desire."

And the Russian followed the two chums and Danny, who had already started over the frozen surface on a sharp run.

The three quickly left the professor and Mazouvitch behind, and after five minutes' run, a spirit of mischief came over them, and they darted behind a pile of rocks to hide from their older companions.

As they crouched down behind the rocks, they suddenly became conscious of the fact that it was snowing.

They no sooner realized this than they arose to their feet.

It was astonishing how quickly the storm gathered in force. A fierce wind sprung up as if by magic, and the flakes came down so fast that it seemed as if snow was being swept upon them from the roof of a building.

"Whew!" exclaimed Royal. "I never saw it snow so in my life. We had better get back as soon as possible."

They at once left the pile of rocks and started to join the professor and Mazouvitch.

But it was snowing so fast that they could not see twenty feet ahead of them, and after ten minutes' walk it gradually dawned upon them that they must be proceeding in the wrong direction.

"We had better call out," said Frank.

Uniting their voices, they did so several times, but the roaring of the chill wind was the only answer they got.

With pale faces the three looked at each other.

"Is it possible we cannot make ourselves heard?" exclaimed Royal. "Come, we must find the edge of this snowy tract as soon as possible. The professor and the Russian no doubt went back as soon as the snow began to fall, thinking we would do the same."

With our hero in the lead, they again advanced in the direction they deemed the right one.

At intervals of a minute they kept shouting, but never once did they get a reply.

On—on they kept for fully half an hour.

The snow was gaining so rapidly that it was now nearly to their knees.

A feeling of absolute loneliness came upon them, and they realized that they were lost in a Siberian snowstorm.

On they plunged for another half hour, and then, just as they felt that they had no strength to proceed farther, they came upon the pile of rocks they had dodged behind to play a prank upon Professor Juggles and the Russian.

They had been traveling in a circle for over an hour!

And now they were so exhausted that they could go no farther until they had a good rest, and the snow was piling up higher and higher all the time.

What a contrast between this scene and the fair land of sunshine a few short miles distant!

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAVED!

Prof. Juggles and the Russian paid but little attention to the actions of their three companions, and kept on walking in the direction they had started.

Suddenly they became aware that it was snowing.

Then it was that they missed the three boys.

"We must go back!" cried Mazouvitch, in a voice of alarm. "In two minutes we will be unable to see our way. Call your friends."

Raising his voice, the professor obeyed, but the violent gusts of wind completely drowned his cries.

The storm now swept upon them with such fury that they were almost blinded.

Loudly the names of Royal and Frank were shouted by the professor, but he could not have been heard fifteen yards away.

He was for pushing on in the direction the boys had taken, but the Russian seized him by the shoulder.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "If we would save them and ourselves, we must not go a bit farther at present. We are not too far from the rocks that line this snowbound place, and we can surely shape our course so as to reach them. But if we get one-fourth of a mile farther we might travel about in a circle until we were forced to succumb to the cold and the fury of the snow. We must go back to our starting point, and then with our pocket compass shape our course in the direction the young men were running. That is our only hope of finding them before it is too late."

"Is there any chance of the storm abating very soon?" asked the professor, nervously.

"There may be a lull presently. But come! let us get back; there is a possibility of their being there now."

Reluctantly the professor followed his companion through the blinding snowflakes.

Though they were but a short distance from the crest of the mighty hill they had been so long ascending, it took them nearly half an hour to reach the spot.

"This is awful!" groaned the professor. "The poor fellows will certainly perish if we do not find them soon!"

"Get your compass," said the Russian.

The professor obeyed.

"According to my mind, the young men took a south-easterly direction," said Mazouvitch.

"Hurry up, then," was the reply.

With the fierce wind and the blinding snow beating upon them, the two men started.

But they soon found that the snow was so deep they could proceed but slowly.

The professor soon grew disheartened, and gave vent to exclamations of despair at almost every step they took.

But not so with the Russian. Old as he was, he was powerful, and his endurance was something wonderful.

Clutching his companion by the shoulder, he fairly dragged him through the snow, which was growing deeper every moment.

Presently an exclamation of joy left the Russian's lips. He beheld the faint vestige of tracks in the snow.

"We have struck the trail!" he shouted in the professor's ear, in order to make himself heard. "We must hurry and follow them before the wind wipes the tracks out."

The tracks must have been made but a very short time before, as they certainly would have been obliterated by the fierce wind in ten minutes.

A moment later came a gust more violent than any that had preceded it, and then there was no more tracks to be seen.

But the Russian did not become discouraged. Dragging his well-nigh exhausted companion along, he kept floundering through the snow.

An hour had now passed since the storm begun, and brave and determined as he was, Mazouvitch felt that they could proceed no farther.

"We must go back," he hoarsely shouted in the professor's ear. "Even now we have only one chance in ten of reaching safety."

A wail of grief and despair was all the reply he got. But suddenly the professor's manner altered.

"There is still a chance of finding them!" he exclaimed. "They cannot hear us when we shout, but they might hear the report of a rifle."

Mazouvitch gave a start.

"You are right," said he. "Discharge your gun at once!"

At that moment a brief lull came, and pointing the muzzle of his rifle to the sky, the professor pressed the trigger.

The report rang out in a strangely muffled way, and then, beyond the roaring of the storm, naught broke the stillness of the snowbound waste.

* * * * *

Horrified at their situation, Royal and his companions sank down in the shelter of the pile of rocks.

Though they were shielded somewhat from the fury of the storm, the air was piercing cold.

"We are surely bound to freeze to death!" said Frank, with chattering teeth.

"If we remain still long, that is bound to happen," returned Royal.

"An' if we go away from here we'll be afther freezin' jist ther same," spoke up the Irish lad. "Oh, why did we not stay down there where it is warm? I niver want ter see it snow ag'in as long as I live!"

"The chances are that you won't," retorted Royal. "But, anyhow——"

He was suddenly interrupted by the discharge of a rifle, very close at hand, it seemed.

A delirium of joy came over the three, and almost simultaneously they raised their weapons and fired answering shots.

Then, with newborn strength they forced their way through the drifting snow, and ran plump into the arms of the professor and Mazouvitch, who had halted within ten feet of the spot where the three had sank down to rest.

The professor cried for joy, and the sudden reunion of the five raised their spirits to such a pitch that they felt equal to the task of getting out of the snowdrifts.

"Come!" exclaimed the Russian. "If we would save ourselves we must hurry. Every minute but makes it worse for us."

Taking the compass from the professor's trembling hands, Mazouvitch laid the course for their starting point, and then the battle for life or death began.

In many places the snow was up to their necks, and yet it had been storming but a trifle over an hour.

Slowly but surely they forced their way through, and at length the Russian encouraged his companions by saying that he was satisfied they had made more than half the distance.

On they struggled, until at length the bleak-looking gray rocks that skirted the brink of the desolate waste that overlooked the valley confronted them.

A cry of joy came from the lips of the wearied adventurers.

They were saved at last!

But just then a fierce growl came to their ears, and the next instant the body of a huge animal reared up before them.

"A bear!" exclaimed Mazouvitch. "Look out for him, friends!"

Before the words had died from his lips the animal plunged forward and knocked the professor down with a blow from one of its huge paws.

It was now close enough for them to see that it was gaunt and hungry-looking, and in their exhausted condition a feeling of dismay came upon them.

"Shoot it!" screamed the Russian. "Kill the bear at once, or we are lost!"

These words seemed to bring Royal and Frank to their senses.

Just as the animal was about to pounce upon the fallen professor they thrust the muzzles of their rifles to within an inch of its fiery eyes and fired so nearly together that the reports almost blended into one.

With a blood-curdling roar the bear fell forward upon the prostrate professor and, after a few struggles, lay still.

"He is dead!" exclaimed Royal; "but I am afraid the professor is hurt."

Together they seized the carcass and rolled it over.

The professor, who was completely buried in the snow, was dragged forth in an unconscious condition.

Exerting all their remaining strength in one mighty effort, they dragged him to the other side of the rock, and then began descending toward the valley below.

They did not halt until they had gone a hundred feet or more, and then, coming upon a dry, sheltered cave, they crept in to recover their breath.

CHAPTER XIX.

BACK TO AKARN.

It was several minutes before the professor was restored to consciousness, and when he opened his eyes and saw his friends bending over him, a long-drawn sigh of relief escaped his lips.

The Russian carried a flask containing a stimulant not unlike brandy, and this served to put all hands in better spirits.

As soon as they had rested themselves, Frank and Danny crept out of the cave in search of something to make a fire with.

They were not long in discovering a huge evergreen tree that had been blown down by some furious wind of the past, and lay there ready to be utilized as fuel.

With their knives they cut off a couple of armfuls of the smaller branches and started a fire near the mouth of the cave.

Then all hands waded through the snow and dragged the tree to the fire.

"I guess we can make out for a while," observed Frank, as he warmed his hands over the comforting blaze.

"As night is coming on, I don't think we can better ourselves much by going any farther down till morning," said Royal. "We have enough provisions for three good meals yet, and this tree will easily keep the fire going all night."

"I agree with you," replied the professor. "I don't feel equal to the task of going any farther to-day. What we have recently passed through has upset me completely."

All hands were satisfied to remain where they were until morning, so they settled down to make themselves comfortable.

"Our late adventure has taught us that it will not be good policy for us to leave the valley of sunlight by any other way than the underground passage," remarked our hero.

"It certainly has," returned Frank.

"Then, before we get back home we will be afther goin' amongst ther haythens that live under ther ground?" asked the Irish lad.

"Yes."

"Well, bedad! that is better than freezin' ter death in her snow an' bein' ate up by bears."

As soon as darkness set in the party divided themselves into watches and prepared to pass the night as best they could.

It seemed to be a long time before day broke, but it did after a while, and then, after eating a meal of dried meat and a loaf of dark bread they had brought from the city, they prepared to make the descent to the valley below.

It was still snowing, but as their way led downward, it was comparatively easy traveling.

Leaving the fire still smoldering in front of the cave, they set out.

In an hour's time they were beyond the reach of the snowstorm, but it was raining steadily.

They scarcely made a halt until they reached the valley, which, owing to the roundabout course they had been forced to take, took them until noon.

"Now for the city of Akarn!" exclaimed Royal. "No more Siberian snowstorms for me."

"So say we all," returned Frank.

The Russian smiled.

"I am glad you are satisfied with the country above this valley," said he. "It was nothing short of a miracle that I reached this place after escaping from the mines and journeying, as I did, hundreds of miles over a snow-covered waste."

"How did you manage to subsist so long?" asked the professor.

"I had firearms, which I stole from the guards, and a flint and steel. I would kill a bear or a wolf, or anything, and cook them as best I could. Many times, when I had nothing to build a fire with, I have eaten raw flesh. Once I went to sleep rolled up in the skin of a bear I had just slain, and when I awoke there was six feet of snow on top of me."

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"None of it for me," said he.

The journey to the city was made without anything out of the ordinary happening.

Media welcomed her lover with all the affection a young fellow's sweetheart could possibly show.

When she heard the story of his adventure in the snow-storm, she told him that he must never leave the valley again unless she went with him.

Royal promised that he would not, and the maiden was satisfied.

The next day Frank and Royal got together, and after carefully reading over the manuscript book, they gleaned the following, which we will sum up briefly:

In the neighborhood of about a hundred and twenty years ago a man supposed to be a Russian was wrecked on an island of rocks somewhere in Behring Straits. He was a scientific man, and a magician as well, and was one of an exploring party who had set out from China a year before.

He was the only one who escaped death, and as he wandered about the rocks he suddenly came upon an opening in the ground.

He at once entered it, and found that it was but the beginning of an underground passage.

With nothing but the apparatus of a magician of over a century ago, which was all he had saved from the wreck, he set out to explore the passage.

Being a resolute man, he kept on, until finally he came upon a settlement of human beings in a vast cavern under the earth and beneath the waters of the ocean!

The people were very savage, and rushed upon him to kill him; but as they spoke he saw that their language was so much like his own that he could readily understand it.

He waved them back, and exclaimed that he was the king of their race, and that he had lived since the commencement of time, and would live forever!

Then he performed a marvelous sleight-of-hand trick, and they fell to the ground, ready to do his bidding.

That was the beginning of the mysteries of the underground country.

As there were ample materials and resources in the underground place, the Russian caused the temple to be erected, after he had devised a means to get over the circular chasm, which was but a freak of nature caused by some volcanic eruption.

It was this man who built all the peculiar contrivances and the intricate mechanism of the temple and its surroundings.

He took one of the native women as a wife, and a son was born him.

When he died the son took his place, according to the instructions of his father, and the natives were none the wiser.

The son was king when John Gaul visited the place, and got possession of the enchanted diamond.

He lived to be of great age, and shortly before he died he made a journey to the island of rocks.

Here he came upon a party of shipwrecked Englishmen, and as the king did not have a son, he determined that one of these men should succeed him.

He watched his chance, and when one had taken himself slightly apart from the others he slew them by means of an explosive ball.

Then he induced the remaining fellow, who was but a boy of sixteen, to go with him to the temple in the underground country.

This fellow became king in due time, and was the one now reigning.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT BEFELL SANDIS.

After the escape of our friends from the Rabanos country, there was a revolt at the weakness of the king in allowing the diamond to be taken away. The king was deposed and imprisoned and Sandis is declared ruler. He at once put himself at the head of an army and marched toward the Land of Sunlight.

Sandis led his army with the air of a conqueror. He anticipated an easy victory over the inhabitants of the Land of Sunlight, for the reason that they had never offered any resistance when the king paid visits to the place.

According to what one of the men, who had made the journey several times before, told him, it would take about three hundred and fifty hours to cover the distance on foot.

His informant was called the Ox, because of his great size and strength, and of all the men under Sandis, this fellow was the only jealous one.

He reasoned to himself that Sandis had no more right than he to proclaim himself ruler of the people.

And Sandis was a little suspicious of the Ox, too, for he kept ever at his side and endeavored to be as friendly as possible.

The Ox kept up considerable thinking as the army wended its way in the direction of the Land of Sunlight, and long before they reached there he came to the conclusion that he was more fitted to be king than Sandis.

When he had settled this point firmly in his mind, he began talking to his friends in secret, and the result of it was that he soon had about half the army on his side.

One thing about the queer underground people was that they never imparted anything that was communicated to them as a secret.

This fact showed that there was bound to be serious trouble between Sandis and the Ox before long.

During the long journey to the Land of Sunlight everything went as harmoniously as one could wish for, and when they finally emerged from the passage into the valley, Sandis led his army in a prolonged cheer.

As it was near nightfall when they got here, they went into camp in order to get a good rest before marching upon the city of Akarn.

Sandis felt that as our friends were among the people of the valley, they might have some little trouble in taking possession of the city and doing as they pleased.

On the other hand, the Ox was too thick-headed, by far, to give this a thought. He had been to the place on more than one occasion, and as there had never been any resistance shown, he took it for granted that it would be the same this time.

He was very cunning, however, and had already formed a plan to get rid of Sandis. Then it would be plain sailing for him, as he imagined.

The next morning every man was up with the sun, and Sandis gave the order to move upon the city and take its inhabitants by surprise.

When they reached the commencement of the narrow path that led along the edge of the lake, Sandis called upon the Ox to assist him in conducting the men over.

This was the very opportunity the big native desired.

He promptly took his position at the side of the self-proclaimed king and passed the word to the army to proceed in single file.

When halfway over the dangerous place he called a halt.

"Men," said he, in a bull-like voice, "are you satisfied that Sandis shall be your king?"

Like the burst of a tempest those of his friends who were in hearing of his voice, cried out:

"No!"

Astonished and enraged, Sandis turned upon the Ox, and exclaimed:

"What means this?"

"It means," retorted the burly native, "that the majority of our people do not want you to rule them."

"Who, then, do they want?"

"They want me—the Ox! He who is all powerful and a friend to them."

Sandis was thunderstruck when he heard this declaration.

He stood as if rooted to the spot, for he was taken completely by surprise.

"Look you in the waters of the lake, Sandis," went on the Ox, his hoarse voice sounding like the blast of a dozen trumpets. "When a man once plunges into its depths he is never seen again. It is just as bad for him to fall into the fiery chasm in our own land as it is for him to plunge into that mysterious water."

"I have been told that this is true," returned Sandis, his face pale with fear, and an expression of horror gleaming from his eyes.

"Ay! you have been told so; and now you shall know it is so!"

The next instant the giant savage seized him about the body and raised him above his head.

There was a deathly silence for the space of a few seconds, and then Sandis went whirling through the air far out into the lake.

There was a loud splash and then he disappeared.

A pent-up howl of rage left the lips of the doomed man's friends when they saw that his body did not come to the surface.

War was now declared between the two factions!

But, without a leader, Sandis' followers were loath to begin.

On the other hand, the Ox gave the command for those who were in favor of him to follow him over the dangerous path.

They obeyed quickly enough, and nearly all of them were over before the other faction had found a man to lead them.

Then a fight started and a score or more were killed on both sides by the explosive balls.

Several tumbled into the lake, too, but at the end of an hour the giant had all of his men on the other side, with the exception, of course, of those who had perished one way or the other.

Instead of proceeding on to Akarn, the Ox went into camp with his men near the shore of the lake.

Then he gave it out that all those on the other side who wished to cast their lot with him, had the privilege of so doing.

About a hundred accepted the invitation, but the others refused in a very dogged manner.

They meant to fight for the cause of their lost king until they died.

Barbarous as they were, they had their ideas of right and wrong.

They judged that the Ox was a pig-headed fool, who had no more idea of governing a people than the animal from which he took his name.

And they were right, too, for the giant had taken the step that was soon to bring ruin upon the underground country and its inhabitants.

The Ox waited for over an hour, and then, seeing that no more of the men were going to join him, he gave the order for the army to proceed to the city of the Land of Sunlight.

On they marched until they were within half a mile of the city, their leader elated at his recent success.

But they were destined to have a big surprise before they were many minutes older.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PROFESSOR BECOMES A BENEDICT.

As Sandis sank beneath the waters of the lake a feeling of horror came over him, for he thought he was going to a certain death.

Down he was dragged in exactly the same manner as Frank Mercer had been.

He made powerful efforts to reach the surface, and when he finally succeeded in doing so he was in the cave with the skeletons.

Almost exhausted, Sandis yet managed to drag himself out of the water upon the ledge.

Then, as his staring eyes rested upon the skeletons, a cry left his lips, and he fell in a swoon on the rock.

Many minutes passed before the man returned to consciousness, and when he did so he staggered to his feet in a dazed manner.

As his eyes lit upon the grawsome objects scattered about him, a shudder shook his frame, and he made a leap for the opening through which the light of day streamed.

As Sandis saw the pleasant aspect before him he realized that he was saved, and almost immediately his coolness returned to him.

He crawled through the hole; and then, as luck would have it, he caught sight of a group of men standing above him near the edge of the ravine.

As he glanced at them he saw they were his own people, and one of them one of his trusted friends.

Sandis at once shouted to them, and when the underground natives beheld their king alive and well, a joyous cry went up from them.

Sandis was not compelled to take a roundabout course in order to get out of the ravine, as Frank had done, for those above him quickly produced a rope and lowered an end to him.

As soon as he made it fast beneath his arms they hauled him up.

"Behold your king, alive and well!" exclaimed Sandis. "He has escaped from the waters of the lake, and now the villain, the Ox, must be punished!"

"He shall die!" returned his hearers in unison.

"That he shall!" said Sandis. "Lead me to the rest of my men. I would learn how many I have on my side."

The natives promptly conducted him to a spot near the beginning of the dangerous path where those who had refused to cast their lot with the Ox had formed a camp.

Great was the welcome that the king received from his faithful followers.

He counted his men at once, and found that he had over a hundred.

From them he learned that the Ox had started for the city of Akarn but a few minutes before.

"We will follow him at once, for I must slay the Ox with my own hand!" exclaimed Sandis.

A cheer went up from the men, and they got ready to do their king's bidding.

Forming them into single file, Sandis led the way across the narrow path to the other side.

All got over without accident, and then, but fifteen minutes behind the Ox and his men, they set out for the city.

Meanwhile our friends had not been idle.

They anticipated that Sandis would lead an army upon them, and as soon as Frank Mercer and Royal had explained the contents of the book, Media set about making translations of it and distributing copies among the people.

In two days the inhabitants began to grow very much interested, and little by little they were led to believe that they had been unjustly imposed upon by the underground people for many generations.

Mazouvitch, the Russian, delivered a rousing speech, in which he advised the populace to prepare to resist the men of the Rabanos country when they again made their appearance.

His words had good effect, and the majority of the inhabitants of the Land of Sunlight began arming themselves so as to be in readiness.

Under the supervision of Royal Henderson a factory was established for the manufacture of spears and other rude weapons of war.

This factory was in full blast for a week or two, and then our hero became satisfied that they had all the weapons they could possibly need.

They had now nothing to do but to wait for the approach of the enemy.

All our friends were certain that they would come, and in order that they might not be taken by surprise, a couple of men were stationed near the narrow path by the side of the lake to keep watch and appraise them of the coming of Sandis and his men.

Things were in this state when Prof. Juggles startled Royal and Frank with the announcement that he was going to be married.

Media's mother was the lucky woman, and the wedding was to take place on the same day that the professor made it known to his friends and companions.

The chums had long had a suspicion that such a thing might happen some time, but they had no idea of it taking place so soon.

Even Media had been unaware of it until now, and when she had recovered from her surprise, she, like the rest, took to the situation in a kindly manner.

Shortly before the hour the ceremony was to take place the professor appeared in a brand-new suit of clothes, which were cut and made after the fashion of the country.

The learned man looked ridiculous enough in his new rig, but the inhabitants thought him a dandy.

The ceremony was to take place at the home of the bride, and when the clergyman appeared the rooms were packed almost to suffocation.

The marriage took place in due and ancient form, according to the precepts of the race of people who inhabited the strange Land of Sunlight.

When the assemblage took their places at the tables, upon which the wedding feast was spread, the professor arose and made a rather lengthy speech, which he concluded by stating that he had visited all quarters of the globe, but never, until he reached the beautiful valley of the Land of Sunlight, had his heart yearned for the companionship of a wife.

The applause he received was loud and prolonged, and then all hands proceeded to clean up the good things set before them.

There was an abundant supply of spirits, and Royal and Frank were forced to keep a sharp eye on Danny Butler, for fear he might take a drop too much.

However, the Irish lad became very witty, and more than one comical toast was given by him in honor of the newly wedded pair.

"Bedad!" exclaimed Danny, "I believe that our friend, Misther Billy Yamble, will be ther nixt one to step off."

This caused a loud laugh, as the sailor had not shown the least inclination that way, and it made him just a trifle angry.

The toast of the day was given by our hero, and was as follows:

"Here's to the Enchanted Diamond! It has been the means of leading us to two unknown parts of the globe; it has made a benedict of an honored old bachelor, and there is no telling what it may accomplish yet."

"You might add that it has also been the means of causing you to give your heart to the beautiful Media, the child of sunlight, and the fairest flower that ever blossomed in the Russian Empire!" quickly exclaimed Frank.

"That's so," said the Irish boy. "Three cheers for the Enchanted Diamond!"

Just as the cheers were about to be given a man rushed in with the news that Sandis was approaching at the head of an army!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BATTLE.

The wedding festivities were quickly brought to a close, and the guests hurriedly left the house.

Foremost among them were Royal, Frank and Danny.

They learned from the two men who had been detailed to watch for the approach of the enemy, that they had waited long enough to see that the underground people, who were in vast numbers, were going to file over the path at the side of the lake. Then they made their way unseen to Akarn to report.

"That being the case," said Royal, "they must be pretty well on their way here. Although it will take them some time to get over the narrow place, and if some of them don't fall into the lake they will be exceedingly lucky."

He then gave orders to the various men, who had been chosen as leaders, to prepare for the attack, and be as silent as possible about it.

With their rifles and revolvers ready for instant use, our three friends paraded up and down near the outskirts of the city, in the direction the enemy must certainly come from.

But an hour passed by, and they had not showed up yet, though two or three times they thought they heard voices shouting in the distance.

At length Frank climbed a tall tree to get a better view of the surrounding country.

Before he had reached the top he caught sight of a column of men advancing upon the city.

"Here they come!" he shouted to those below him. "They are not a mile away from us."

"Get ready!" shouted Royal to the various leaders. "The first thing the savage crowd will do when they get here will be to hurl their explosive balls right and left. Get your men together, on either side of the roadways behind the bushes, and the moment they throw their fire balls charge among them with your spears. If you will do this, myself and friends will see that none of them enter the city. Remember, you are fighting for your liberty!"

His words were quickly translated to the entire army, and a rousing cheer was the response.

So well were the men disciplined, that in a very few minutes they had taken their positions behind the bushes.

Then Royal ordered a dozen or more of the men to walk leisurely about the place, as though they were expecting nothing to happen, with instructions for them to run at the first sight of the enemy.

Then our hero and his companions got behind a clump of trees and waited.

When ten minutes had passed, the tramp of the approaching horde of underground people could be heard plainly.

A breathless silence reigned about the locality of the waiting army.

One—two—three minutes passed, and then the Ox and his followers appeared on the scene.

With a wild yell they rushed for the few men who were in sight, and those immediately fled in genuine terror.

Bang! bang! bang! The Rabanos men began to hurl their explosive balls after them.

Then a mighty roar was heard, and the waiting army dashed full into their midst, using their spears with telling effect.

The Ox was so badly surprised that it was fully a minute before he was capable of giving a single order.

Then he endeavored to rally his men and force his way into the city.

But the moment a move was made in their direction the rifles of our friends began cracking, and the barbarians commenced falling like grain before the sickle.

With the short clubs they were armed with the attacking crowd could not put up much of a battle against the spears of the inhabitants of the valley, and they dared not throw any of the explosive balls for fear of killing some of their own number. Then, again, the firearms of Royal and his companions were too much for them, so there was only one thing left for the Ox to do, and that was to make an effort to retreat.

Frantically the giant yelled to his men to fall back, and gradually they did so.

But the men of the Land of Sunlight were now fully aroused to what they deemed their sense of duty, and though this was the first time they had ever offered resistance to their enemies, they went at it like demons.

When the attacking army began to retreat they speared them right and left as they fled, and when the last man had got beyond their lines the Ox had left fully half his followers dead and wounded upon the greensward of the beautiful valley.

"My!" exclaimed Frank. "Did you ever see anything like it? These people can fight like demons when they are once aroused! It is a wonder to me how they ever allowed the underground savages to impose upon them like they have for generations. Why, one of these people can whip four of those fellows."

"The underground people are but getting their just deserts," returned Royal. "Say, Frank, old fellow, do you know, I have been doing a deal of thinking the past few minutes?"

"What have you been thinking about?"

"I have been thinking that we will never have a better opportunity than now to make a start to get back home."

"By Jove! you are right, I guess."

"Bedad! I am afther thinkin' so, too," spoke up Danny Butler.

"My wife and I are ready to go at any time," said the professor. "That was the understanding when I married her."

"Well," exclaimed Royal, "we will leave right away, then. I hate to leave these good people in such a sneaking way, but it must be done if we expect to get through the underground country in safety."

Leaving the aroused inhabitants pursuing the retreating army, they hastened to the house of the professor's wife.

It did not take long to explain matters to the women folks, and in less than half an hour their horses, and enough to supply the wants of the party, were in readiness.

Billy Yamble, the sailor, refused point-blank to leave the place, saying that he was going to stay where he was as long as he lived.

There was no use in urging him, so, mounting their waiting steeds, they set out by a circular course, so as not to come upon the fighting forces, for the narrow path at the side of the lake.

The party consisted of Royal, Frank, the professor, Danny Butler, Media and the professor's wife.

They were all mounted on good animals, and had sufficient provender with them to last a number of days.

There were tears in the eyes of the females as they turned their backs upon the beautiful city of Akarn, in the Land of Sunlight, for they realized that it was quite probable that they would never see it again.

But, like brave women, they had cast their lots with the ones they loved, and not a word of complaint left their lips.

As the party neared the lake they were astonished to see a fierce battle raging near its shore.

The two factions of the underground people had met and were slaying each other with their clubs and explosive balls.

Half a mile distant the army of the Land of Sunlight were grouped on a little hill, watching the conflict with interest.

As our friends passed the fighting barbarians, they beheld the form of Sandis urging his men forward.

But at that instant he was lost to their gaze forever, for a gigantic man, who was no other than the Ox, suddenly leaped upon him, and then—

One of the peculiar fireballs exploded between them, and the two rivals were blown to atoms!

Without waiting to look longer upon the terrible scene of bloodshed, they hastened for the path.

Reaching it, they passed over in safety, and then made for the mouth of the underground passage.

As this was reached the sun was just sinking below the western horizon, and pointing to it, our hero took Media by the arm and exclaimed:

"Look upon the god of day, from which your beautiful country takes its name! When next you see it you will

be upon the shores of my country, which, I have reason to believe, you will learn to love as much as you do your own. For, with the enchanted diamond in my possession, I will lead you there in safety!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

Our friends reached the temple of the underground country without mishap, and without being overtaken by the remnant's of Sandis' army.

Nearly all the people they saw in the place were females, and these, nor the few men they met, did not offer to harm them.

The bridge was across the chasm, and upon investigation it was found that some of the mysterious machinery that controlled it was broken so that it could not be moved.

At the suggestion of Royal they went inside of the huge edifice and explored its many rooms.

They succeeded in finding three more diamonds, which greatly resembled the enchanted stone, though not quite as large.

Beyond this they found nothing new, and when they turned their backs upon the temple they could but marvel at the ingenuity of the man who had constructed it years before.

Though the mysteries concerning it had all been explained, the greatest wonder of all was the man himself.

The professor said he certainly must have been more than human, or he could never have brought about what he did.

Royal did not deem it advisable to remain in that vicinity very long, so, as soon as they had replenished their supply of provisions, they resumed their journey.

As Royal had explained to Media the manner of their entering the passage in Alaska, she suggested that when they emerged from it they should seal it in the same manner as it had been sealed by John Gaul.

All hands agreed to this, so the girl produced a trowel, a piece of crystal, and the necessary compounds to make the mortar, and placed them in a skin bag.

Not one of the natives offered to oppose them during their journey through the inhabited section of the wonderful underground country, and in due time they were proceeding through the dark, lengthy passage.

At length, one morning at sunrise, they came to the end of the underground journey, and it was with a shout of joy from all hands that they hailed the sight of the glorious orb of day.

But a cold, dreary aspect was now before them, for winter had about arrived, and winter in Alaska is not nearly so pleasant as it is in New York.

But they had brought along extra robes, and so they were not so badly off, after all.

When all hands emerged from the passage into the cave, Media mixed the necessary mortar, and under the combined efforts of them all the two boulders were rolled together.

Then Royal placed the piece of crystal across the joint and Media applied the mortar.

In a few minutes it became as hard as stone, and the mouth of the passage leading to the land of mystery and wonder was once more sealed.

"Now," said our hero, "it is not necessary to have the enchanted diamond to open this passage, as anything that will cut good, hard glass will do. So you will see that the enchanted diamond is not an enchanted diamond, after all. It is nothing more than a stone that is worth a few thousands of dollars, but which, somehow, was regarded with a superstitious dread by one of the great kings of the Rabanos country, who desired his subjects to regard him as one who had lived forever."

"We will always call it the enchanted diamond, just the same," replied Frank, "and you, Royal, must always keep it in your family."

The journey to Kingogun was a tedious, not to say perilous, one. The snow lay deep upon the ground, and not once did the temperature rise above zero.

But our travelers proved themselves equal to the task before them, and at length reached the little Alaskan seaport.

From here they proceeded, after a long wait, to Port Townsend, and then the rest was easy enough.

It was early in May when they arrived in New York, and the professor promptly took up his residence in a fashionable quarter of the city.

Royal and his sweetheart, the fair child of Sunlight, remained with him, Media being desirous of living with her mother until after her own marriage.

Frank Mercer went home to his parents, and Danny Butler sailed for the old country, to show his relatives and friends what it was to be a rich young Irishman.

A couple of years later Royal and Media were married, and the pin that adorned the breast of the beautiful bride was set with the Enchanted Diamond.

THE END.

The next issue, No. 52, will contain "Two Brave Chums; or, The Outlaws of Blackwater Gap," by the author of "Dick Hazel, Explorer." This is a railroad story, full of exciting adventures. The two chums, a young engineer and a young detective, attempt to run down a dangerous band of outlaws, and what happens to them forms a story of the most intense interest, fascinating from beginning to end.

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